ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

An American Mercury Publication

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*Number 45

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Big Shot — BRETT HALLIDAY
The Quarterdeck Club — LESLIE CHARTERIS
The Case of the Frenchman's Gloves — MARGERY ALLINGHAM
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LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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One of the most misused words in the lexicon of larceny is "gunsel." James Sandoe has written a short piece that puts the meaning of the word once and for all in its proper place. Mr. Sandoe is one of our best informed and most enthusiastic crime connoisseurs. We are happy to let him take the stand, as an expert witness for the prosecution:

"In spite of the eight-minute eggs," testifies Mr. Sandoe, "a gunsel is only rarely a gunman. As A. A. Avery pointed out in 'The Saturday Review of Literature' on June 27, 1942, a gunman may be a torpedo or a triggerman or troops, but only in THE MALTESE FALCON *is he a gunsel.*

"Wilmer, the fat man's friend, happened to be a gunman as well as a mustard pot; but his itching trigger finger had nothing whatever to do with his being called a 'gunsel.' Gunsel (the variant spellings of which are almost infinite: gunsil, guntzel, gonsil, etc.) is defined in various ways by the great Oxford English dictionary (the 'N.E.D.') as 'an inexperienced youth' but also in reverse connotation as 'clever, crafty, treacherous.' Hammett's meaning, though, and the one to which Avery referred, is its catamite definition. According to the placid N.E.D.: 'a boy kept for immoral purposes.'"

All of which proves again that Dashiell Hammett knows his words, knows how to string them together, knows how to invest them with overtones and undertones, knows how to parlay their meanings, their impact, and their emotional toughness. You will find further proof of Hammett's word-wisdom in another of his early stories from "Black Mask," this one going back to those fabulous middle 1920s when "Black Mask's" editorial policy insisted, to quote from their own credo, on the requirements "of plausibility, of truthfulness in details, of realism in the picturing of thought, the portrayal of action and emotion."

THE CREEPING SIAMESE

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

STANDING beside the cashier's desk in the front office of the Continental Detective Agency's San Francisco branch, I was watching Porter check up my expense account when the man came in. He was a tall man, raw-boned, hard-faced. Grey clothes bagged loosely from his wide shoulders. In the late afternoon sunlight that came through partially drawn blinds, his skin showed the color of new tan shoes.

He opened the door briskly, and then hesitated, standing in the doorway, holding the door open, turning the knob back and forth with one bony hand. There was no indecision in his face. It was ugly and grim, and

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its expression was the expression of a man who is remembering something disagreeable.

Tommy Howd, our freckled and snub-nosed office boy, got up from his desk and went to the rail that divided the office.

"Do you —?" Tommy began, and jumped back.

The man had let go the doorknob. He crossed his long arms over his chest, each hand gripping a shoulder. His mouth stretched wide in a yawn that had nothing to do with relaxation. His mouth clicked shut. His lips snarled back from clenched yellow teeth.

"Hell!" he grunted, full of disgust, and pitched down on the floor.

I heaved myself over the rail, stepped across his body, and went out into the corridor.

Four doors away, Agnes Braden, a plump woman of thirty-something who runs a public stenographic establishment, was going into her office.

"Miss Braden!" I called, and she turned, waiting for me to come up. "Did you see the man who just came in our office?"

"Yes." Curiosity put lights in her green eyes. "A tall man who came up in the elevator with me. Why?"

"Was he alone?"

"Yes. That is, he and I were the only ones who got off at this floor. Why?"

"Did you see anybody close to him?"

"No, though I didn't notice him in the elevator. Why?"

"Did he act funny?"

"Not that I noticed. Why?"

"Thanks. I'll drop in and tell you about it later."

I made a circuit of the corridors on our floor, finding nothing.

The raw-boned man was still on the floor when I returned to the office, but he had been turned over on his back. He was as dead as I had thought. The Old Man, who had been examining him, straightened up as I came in. Porter was at the telephone, trying to get the police. Tommy Howd's eyes were blue half-dollars in a white face.

"Nothing in the corridors," I told the Old Man. "He came up in the elevator with Agnes Braden. She says he was alone, and she saw nobody close to him."

"Quite so." The Old Man's voice and smile were as pleasantly polite as if the corpse at his feet had been a part of the pattern in the carpet. Fifty years of sleuthing have left him with no more emotion than a pawnbroker. "He seems to have been stabbed in the left breast, a rather large wound that was staunched with this piece of silk" — one of his feet poked at a rumpled ball of red cloth on the floor — "which seems to be a sarong."

Today is never Tuesday to the Old Man: it *seems* to be Tuesday.

"On his person," he went on, "I have found some nine hundred dollars in bills of various denominations, and some silver; a gold watch and a pocket knife of English manufacture; a Japanese silver coin, 50 *sen;* tobacco, pipe

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and matches; a Southern Pacific timetable; two handkerchiefs without laundry marks; a pencil and several sheets of blank paper; four two-cent stamps; and a key labeled *Hotel Montgomery, Room 540.*

"His clothes seem to be new. No doubt we shall learn something from them when we make a more thorough examination, which I do not care to make until the police come. Meanwhile, you had better go to the Montgomery and see what you can learn there."

In the Hotel Montgomery's lobby the first man I ran into was the one I wanted: Pederson, the house copper, a blond-mustached ex-bartender who didn't know any more about gumshoeing than I do about saxophones, but who does know people and how to handle them, which is what his job calls for.

"Hullo!" he greeted me. "What's the score?"

"Six to one, Seattle, end of the fourth. Who's in 540, Pete?"

"They're not playing in Seattle, you chump! Portland! A man that hasn't got enough civic spirit to know where his team —"

"Stop it, Pete! I've got no time to be fooling with your childish pastimes. A man just dropped dead in our joint with one of your room-keys in his pocket — 540."

Civic spirit went blooey in Pederson's face.

"540?" He stared at the ceiling. "That would be that fellow Rounds. Dropped dead, you say?"

"Dead. Tumbled down in the middle of the floor with a knife-cut in him. Who is this Rounds?"

"I couldn't tell you much off-hand. A big bony man with leathery skin. I wouldn't have noticed him excepting he was such a sour looking body."

"That's the bird. Let's look him up."

At the desk we learned that the man had arrived the day before, registering as H. R. Rounds, New York, and telling the clerk he expects to leave within three days. There was no record of mail or telephone calls for him. Nobody knew when he had gone out, since he had not left his key at the desk. Neither elevator boys nor bell-hops could tell us anything.

His room didn't add much to our knowledge. His baggage consisted of one pigskin bag, battered and scarred, and covered with the marks of labels that had been scraped off. It was locked, but traveling bag locks don't amount to much. This one held us up about five minutes.

Rounds' clothes — some in the bag, some in the closet — were neither many nor expensive, but they were all new. The washable stuff was without laundry marks. Everything was of popular makes, widely advertised brands that could be bought in any city in the country. There wasn't a piece of paper with anything written on it. There wasn't an identifying tag. There wasn't anything in the room to tell where Rounds had come from or why.

Pederson was peevish about it.

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"I guess if he hadn't got killed he'd of beat us out of a week's bill! These guys that don't carry anything to identify 'em, and that don't leave their keys at the desk when they go out, ain't to be trusted too much!"

We had just finished our search when a bell-hop brought Detective Sergeant O'Gar, of the police department Homicide Detail, into the room.

"Been down to the Agency?" I asked him.

"Yeah, just came from there?"

"What's new?"

O'Gar pushed back his wide-brimmed black village-constable's hat and scratched his bullet head.

"Not a heap. The doc says he was opened with a blade at least six inches long by a couple wide, and that he couldn't of lived two hours after he got the blade — most likely not more'n one. We didn't find any news on him. What've you got here?"

"His name is Rounds. He registered here yesterday from New York. His stuff is new, and there's nothing on any of it to tell us anything except that he didn't want to leave a trail. No letters, no memoranda, nothing. No blood, no signs of a row, in the room."

O'Gar turned to Pederson.

"Any brown men been around the hotel? Hindus or the like?"

"Not that I saw," the house copper said. "I'll find out for you."

"Then the red silk was a sarong?" I asked.

"And an expensive one," the detective sergeant said. "I saw a lot of 'em the four years I was soldiering on the islands, but I never saw as good a one as that.

"Who wears them?"

"Men and women in the Philippines, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Malay Peninsula, parts of India."

"Is it your idea that whoever did the carving advertised himself by running around in the streets in a red petticoat?"

"Don't try to be funny!" he growled at me. "They're often enough twisted or folded up into sashes or girdles. And how do I know he was knifed in the street? For that matter, how do I know he wasn't cut down in your joint?"

"We always bury our victims without saying anything about 'em. Let's go down and give Pete a hand in search for your brown men."

That angle was empty. Any brown men who had snooped around the hotel had been too good at it to be caught.

I telephoned the Old Man, telling him what I had learned — which didn't cost me much breath — and O'Gar and I spent the rest of the evening sharp-shooting around without ever getting on the target once. We questioned taxicab drivers, questioned the three Roundses listed in the telephone book, and our ignorance was as complete when we were through as when we started.

The morning papers, on the streets at a little after eight o'clock that evening, had the story as we knew it.

At eleven o'clock O'Gar and I

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called it a night, separating in the direction of our respective beds.

We didn't stay apart long.

I opened my eyes sitting on the side of my bed in the dim light of a moon that was just coming up, with the ringing telephone in my hand.

O'Gar's voice: "1856 Broadway! On the hump!"

"1856 Broadway," I repeated, and he hung up.

I finished waking up while I phoned for a taxicab, and then wrestled my clothes on. My watch told me it was 12:55 A.M. as I went downstairs. I hadn't been fifteen minutes in bed.

1856 Broadway was a three-story house set behind a pocket-size lawn in a row of like houses behind like lawns. The others were dark. 1856 shed light from every window, and from the open front door. A policeman stood in the vestibule.

"Hello, Mac! O'Gar here?"

"Just went in."

I walked into a brown and buff reception hall, and saw the detective sergeant going up the wide stairs.

"What's up?" I asked as I joined him.

"Don't know."

On the second floor we turned to the left, going into a library or sitting room that stretched across the front of the house.

A man in pajamas and bathrobe sat on a davenport there, with one bared leg stretched out on a chair in front of him. I recognized him when he nodded to me: Austin Richter, owner of a Market Street moving picture theater. He was a round-faced man of forty-five or so, partly bald, for whom the Agency had done some work a year or so before in connection with a ticket-seller who had departed without turning in the day's receipts.

In front of Richter a thin white-haired man with doctor written all over him stood looking at Richter's leg, which was wrapped in a bandage just below the knee. Beside the doctor, a tall woman in a fur-trimmed dressing-gown stood, a roll of gauze and a pair of scissors in her hands. A husky police corporal was writing in a notebook at a long narrow table, a thick hickory walking stick laying on the bright blue table cover at his elbow.

All of them looked around at us as we came into the room. The corporal got up and came over to us.

"I knew you were handling the Rounds job, sergeant, so I thought I'd best get word to you as soon as I heard there were brown men mixed up in this."

"Good work, Flynn," O'Gar said. "What happened here?"

"Burglary, or maybe only attempted burglary. They was four of them — crashed the kitchen door."

Richter was sitting up very straight, and his blue eyes were suddenly excited, as were the brown eyes of the woman.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but is there — you mentioned brown men in connection with another affair — is there another?"

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O'Gar looked at me.

"You haven't seen the morning papers?" I asked the theater owner.

"No."

"Well, a man came into the Continental office late this afternoon, with a stab in his chest, and died there. Pressed against the wound, as if to stop the bleeding, was a sarong, which is where we got the brown men idea."

"His name?"

"Rounds, H. R. Rounds."

The name brought no recognition into Richter's eyes.

"A tall man, thin, with dark skin?" he asked. "In a grey suit?"

"All of that."

Richter twisted around to look at the woman.

"Molloy!" he exclaimed.

"Molloy!" she exclaimed.

"So you know him?"

Their faces came back toward me.

"Yes. He was here this afternoon. He left —"

Richter stopped, to turn to the woman again, questioningly.

"Yes, Austin," she said, putting gauze and scissors on the table, and sitting down beside him on the davenport. "Tell them."

He patted her hand and looked up at me again with the expression of a man who has seen a nice spot on which to lay down a heavy load.

"Sit down. It isn't a long story, but sit down."

We found ourselves chairs.

"Molloy — Sam Molloy — that is his name, or the name I have always known him by. He came here this afternoon. He'd either called up the theater or gone there, and they had told him I was home. I hadn't seen him for three years. We could see — both my wife and I — that there was something the matter with him when he came in.

"When I asked him, he said he'd been stabbed by a Siamese, on his way here. He didn't seem to think the wound amounted to much, or pretended he didn't. He wouldn't let us fix it for him, or look at it. He said he'd go to a doctor after he left, after he'd got rid of the thing. That was what he had come to me for. He wanted me to hide it, to take care of it until he came for it again.

"He didn't talk much. He was in a hurry, and suffering. I didn't ask him any questions. I couldn't refuse him anything. I couldn't question him even though he as good as told us that it was illegal [illegible] dangerous. He saved our lives once — more than my wife's life — down in Mexico, where we first knew him. That was in 1916. We were caught down there during the Villa troubles. Molloy was running guns over the border, and he had enough influence with the bandits to have us released when it looked as if we were done for.

"So this time, when he wanted me to do something for him, I couldn't ask him about it. I said, 'Yes,' and he gave me the package. It wasn't a large package: about the size of — well — a loaf of bread, perhaps, but quite heavy for its size. It was wrapped in brown paper. We unwrapped it

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after he had gone, that is, we took the paper off. But the inner wrapping was of canvas, tied with silk cord, and sealed, so we didn't open that. We put it upstairs in the pack room, under a pile of old magazines.

"Then, at about a quarter to twelve tonight — I had only been in bed a few minutes, and hadn't gone to sleep yet — I heard a noise in here. I don't own a gun, and there's nothing you could properly call a weapon in the house, but that walking stick" — indicating the hickory stick on the table — "was in a closet in our bedroom. So I got that and came in here to see what the noise was.

"Right outside the bedroom door I ran into a man. I could see him better than he could see me, because this door was open and he showed against the window. He was between me and it, and the moonlight showed him fairly clear. I hit him with the stick, but didn't knock him down. He turned and ran in here. Foolishly, not thinking that he might not be alone, I ran after him. Another man shot me in the leg just as I came through the door.

"I fell, of course. While I was getting up, two of them came in with my wife between them. There were four of them. They were medium-sized men, brown-skinned, but not so dark. I took it for granted that they were Siamese, because Molloy had spoken of Siamese. They turned on the lights here, and one of them, who seemed to be the leader, asked me:

" 'Where is it?'

"His accent was pretty bad, but you could understand his words good enough. Of course I knew they were after what Molloy had left, but I pretended I didn't. They told me, or rather the leader did, that he knew it had been left here, but they called Molloy by another name — Dawson. I said I didn't know any Dawson, and nothing had been left here, and I tried to get them to tell me what they expected to find. They wouldn't, though — they just called it '*it*.'

"They talked among themselves, but of course I couldn't make out a word of what they were saying, and then three of them went out, leaving one here to guard us. He had a Luger pistol. We could hear the others moving around the house. The search must have lasted an hour. Then the one I took for the leader came in, and said something to our guard. Both of them looked quite elated.

" 'It is not wise if you will leave this room for many minutes,' the leader said to me, and they left us — both of them — closing the door behind them.

"I knew they were going, but I couldn't walk on this leg. From what the doctor says, I'll be lucky if I walk on it inside of a couple of months. I didn't want my wife to go out, and perhaps run into one of them before they'd got away, but she insisted on going. She found they'd gone, and she phoned the police, and then ran up to the pack room and found Molloy's package was gone."

"And this Molloy didn't give you

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any hint at all as to what was in the package?" O'Gar asked.

"Not a word, except that it was something the Siamese were after."

"Did he know the Siamese who stabbed him?" I asked.

"I think so," Richter said slowly, "though I am not sure he said he did."

"Do you remember his words?"

"Not exactly, I'm afraid."

"I think I remember them," Mrs. Richter said. "My husband, Mr. Richter, asked him, 'What's the matter, Molloy? Are you hurt, or sick?'"

"Molloy gave a little laugh, putting a hand on his chest, and said, 'Nothing much. I ran into a Siamese who was looking for me on my way here, and got careless and let him scratch me. But I kept my little bundle!'"

"Did he say anything else about the Siamese?"

"Not directly," she replied, "though he did tell us to watch out for any Asiatics we saw around the neighborhood. He said he wouldn't leave the package if he thought it would make trouble for us, but that there was always a chance that something would go wrong, and we'd better be careful. And he told my husband" — nodding at Richter — "that the Siamese had been dogging him for months, but now that he had a safe place for the package he was going to 'take them for a walk and forget to bring them back.' That was the way he put it."

"How much do you know about Molloy?"

"Not a great deal, I'm afraid," Richter took up the answering again. "He liked to talk about the places he had been and the things he had seen, but you couldn't get a word out of him about his own affairs. We met him first in Mexico, as I have told you, in 1916. After he saved us down there and got us away, we didn't see him again for nearly four years. He rang the bell one night, and came in for an hour or two. He was on his way to China, he said, and had a lot of business to attend to before he left.

"Some months later I had a letter from him, from the Queen's Hotel in Kandy, asking me to send him a list of the importers and exporters in San Francisco. He wrote me a letter thanking me for the list, and I didn't hear from him again until he came to San Francisco for a week, about a year later. That was in 1921, I think.

"He was here for another week about a year after that, telling us that he had been in Brazil, but, as usual, not saying what he had been doing there. Some months later I had a letter from him, from Chicago, saying he would be here the following week. However, he didn't come. Instead, some time later, he wrote from Vladivostok, saying he hadn't been able to make it. Today was the first we'd heard of him since then."

"Where's his home? His people?"

"He always says he has neither. I've an idea he was born in England, though I don't know that he ever said so, or what made me think so."

"Got any more questions?" I asked O'Gar.

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"No. Let's give the place the eye, and see if the Siamese left any leads behind 'em."

The eye we gave the house was thorough. We didn't split the territory between us, but went over everything together — everything from roof to cellar.

The cellar did most for us: it was there, in the cold furnace, that we found the handful of black buttons and the fire-darkened garter clasps. But the upper floors hadn't been altogether worthless: in one room we had found the crumpled sales slip of an Oakland store, marked *1 table cover;* and in another room we had found [illegible]garters.

"[illegible] course it's none of my business," I told Richter when O'Gar and I joined the others again, "but I think maybe if you plead self-defense you might get away with it."

He tried to jump up from the davenport, but his short leg failed him.

The woman got up slowly.

"And maybe that would leave an out for you," O'Gar told her. "Why don't you try to persuade him?"

"Or maybe it would be better if you plead the self-defense," I suggested to her. "You could say that Richter ran to your help when your husband grabbed you, that your husband shot him and was turning his gun on you when you stabbed him."

"My husband?"

"Uh-huh, Mrs. Rounds-Molloy-Dawson. Your late husband."

Richter got his mouth far enough closed to get words out of it.

"What is the meaning of this damned nonsense?" he demanded.

"Them's harsh words to come from a fellow like you," O'Gar growled at him. "If this is nonsense, what do you make of that yarn you told us about creeping Siamese and mysterious bundles, and God knows what all?"

"Don't be too hard on him," I told O'Gar. "Being around movies all the time has poisoned his idea of what sounds plausible. If it hadn't, he'd have known better than to see a Siamese in the moonlight at 11:45, when the moon was just coming up at somewhere around 12:45, when you phoned me."

Richter stood up on his one good leg.

The husky police corporal stepped close to him.

"Hadn't I better frisk him, sergeant?"

O'Gar shook his bullet head.

"Waste of time. He's got nothing on him. They cleaned the place of weapons. The chances are the lady dropped them in the bay when she rode over to Oakland to get a table cover to take the place of the sarong her husband carried away with him."

That shook the pair of them. Richter pretended he hadn't gulped, and the woman had a fight of it before she could make her eyes stay still on mine.

O'Gar struck while the iron was hot by bringing the buttons and garter clasps we had salvaged out of his pocket, and letting them trickle from

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one hand to another. That used up the last bit of the facts we had.

I threw a lie at them.

"Never me to knock the press, but you don't want to put too much confidence in what the papers say. For instance, a fellow might say a few pregnant words before he died, and the papers might say he didn't. A thing like that would confuse things."

The woman looked at O'Gar.

"May I speak to Austin alone?" she asked. "I don't mean out of your sight."

The detective sergeant scratched his head and looked at me. This letting your victims go into conference is always a ticklish business: they may decide to come clean, and then again, they may frame up a new out. On the other hand, if you don't let them, the chances are they get stubborn on you, and you can't get anything out of them. One way was as risky as another. I grinned at O'Gar and refused to make a suggestion. He could decide for himself, and, if he was wrong, I'd have him to dump the blame on. He scowled at me, and then nodded to the woman.

"You can go over into that corner and whisper together for a couple of minutes," he said, "but no foolishness."

She gave Richter the hickory stick, took his other arm, helped him hobble to a far corner, pulled a chair over there for him. He sat with his back to us. She stood behind him, leaning over his shoulder, so that both their faces were hidden from us.

O'Gar came closer to me.

"What do you think?" he muttered.

"I think they'll come through."

"That shot of yours about being Molloy's wife hit center. I missed that one. How'd you make it?"

"When she was telling us what Molloy had said about the Siamese she took pains both times she said 'my husband' to show that she meant Richter."

"So? Well —"

The whispering in the far corner had been getting louder, so that the s's had become sharp hisses. Now a clear emphatic sentence came from Richter's mouth.

"I'll be damned if I will!"

Both of them looked furtively over their shoulders, and they lowered their voices again, but not for long. The woman was apparently trying to persuade him to do something. He kept shaking his head. He put a hand on her arm. She pushed it away, and kept on whispering.

He said aloud, deliberately:

"Go ahead, if you want to be a fool. It's your neck. I didn't put the knife in him."

She jumped away from him, her eyes black blazes in a white face. O'Gar and I moved softly toward them.

"You rat!" she spat at Richter, and spun to face us.

"I killed him!" she cried. "This thing in the chair tried to and —"

Richter swung the hickory stick.

I jumped for it — missed —

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crashed into the back of his chair. Hickory stick, Richter, chair, and I sprawled together on the floor. The corporal helped me up. He and I picked Richter up and put him on the davenport again.

The woman's story poured out of her angry mouth:

"His name wasn't Molloy. It was Lange, Sam Lange. I married him in Providence in 1913 and went to China with him — to Canton, where he had a position with a steamship line. We didn't stay there long, because he got into some trouble through being mixed up in the revolution that year. After that we drifted around, mostly around Asia.

"We met this thing" — she pointed at the now sullenly quiet Richter — "in Singapore, in 1919, I think — right after the World War was over. His name is Holley, and Scotland Yard can tell you something about him. He had a proposition. He knew of a gem-bed in upper Burma, one of many that were hidden from the British when they took the country. He knew the natives who were working it, knew where they were hiding their gems.

"My husband went in with him, with two other men that were killed. They looted the natives' cache, and got away with a whole sackful of sapphires, topazes and even a few rubies. The two other men were killed by the natives and my husband was badly wounded.

"We didn't think he could live. We were hiding in a hut near the Yunnan border. Holley persuaded me to take the gems and run away with them. It looked as if Sam was done for, and if we stayed there long we'd be caught. I can't say that I was crazy about Sam anyway; he wasn't the kind you would be, after living with him for a while.

"So Holley and I took it and lit out. We had to use a lot of the stones to buy our way through Yunnan and Kwangsi and Kwangtung, but we made it. We got to San Francisco with enough to buy this house and the movie theater, and we've been here since. We've been honest since we came here, but I don't suppose that means anything. We had enough money to keep us comfortable.

"Today Sam showed up. We hadn't heard of him since we left him on his back in Burma. He said he'd been caught and jailed for three years. Then he'd got away, and had spent the other three hunting for us. He was that kind. He didn't want me back, but he did want money. He wanted everything we had. Holley lost his nerve. Instead of bargaining with Sam, he lost his head and tried to shoot him.

"Sam took his gun away from him and shot him in the leg. In the scuffle Sam had dropped a knife — a kris, I think. I picked it up, but he grabbed me just as I got it. I don't know how it happened. All I saw was Sam staggering back, holding his chest with both hands — and the kris shining red in my hand.

"Sam had dropped his gun. Holley got it and was all for shooting Sam,

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but I wouldn't let him. It happened in this room. I don't remember whether I gave Sam the sarong we used for a cover on the table or not. Anyway, he tried to stop the blood with it. He went away then, while I kept Holley from shooting him.

"I knew Sam wouldn't go to the police, but I didn't know what he'd do. And I knew he was hurt bad. If he dropped dead somewhere, the chances are he'd be traced here. I watched from a window as he went down the street, and nobody seemed to pay any attention to him, but he looked so conspicuously wounded to me that I thought everybody would be sure to remember him if it got into the papers that he had been found dead somewhere.

"Holley was even more scared than I. We couldn't run away, because he had a shot leg. So we made up that Siamese story, and I went over to Oakland, and bought the table cover to take the place of the sarong. We had some guns and even a few oriental knives and swords here. I wrapped them up in paper, breaking the swords, and dropped them off the ferry when I went to Oakland.

"When the morning papers came out we read what had happened, and then we went ahead with what we had planned. We burned the suit Holley had worn when he was shot, and his garters — because the pants had a bullet-hole in them, and the bullet had cut one garter. We fixed a hole in his pajama-leg, unbandaged his leg, — I had fixed it as well as I could, — and washed away the clotted blood until it began to bleed again. Then I gave the alarm."

She raised both hands in a gesture of finality and made a clucking sound with her tongue.

"And there you are," she said.

"You got anything to say?" I asked Holley, who was staring at his leg.

"To my lawyer," he said.

O'Gar spoke to the corporal.

"The wagon, Flynn."

Ten minutes later we were in the street, helping Holley and the woman into a police car.

Around the corner on the other side of the street came three brown-skinned men, apparently Malay sailors. The one in the middle seemed to be drunk, and the other two were supporting him. One of them had a package that could have held a bottle under his arm.

O'Gar looked from them to me and laughed.

"We wouldn't be doing a thing to those babies right now if we had fallen for that yarn, would we?" he whispered.

"Shut up, you, you big heap!" I growled back, nodding at Holley, who was in the car by now. "If that bird sees them he'll identify 'em as his Siamese, and God knows what a jury would make of it!"

We made the puzzled driver twist the car six blocks out of his way to be sure we'd miss the brown men. It was worth it, because nothing interfered with the twenty years apiece that Holley and Mrs. Lange drew.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Leslie Charteris, creator of the Saint, that happy highwayman and benevolent brigand, was born in Singapore. He learned to speak Chinese and Malay from native servants before he knew his English ABC's. By the age of twelve his parents had taken him around the world no less than three times. It is a matter of family record that Leslie began to write at seven, edited his own one-man magazine at ten, had his first publication (a poem) at eleven, and sold his first fiction story at seventeen. Talk about child prodigies! At eighteen, against his better judgment, Leslie was persuaded to enter Cambridge University. He confesses now that a life of crime appealed to him much more strongly. Too highspirited to consider any status lower than that of Master Criminal, Leslie read every book on criminology he could lay his hands on, to say nothing of vast quantities of crime fiction. At this point in his career Leslie faced the crossroads: the left fork led to a life of actual crime; the right fork, to a life of vicarious crime. Leslie chose right: he wrote a full-length crime novel, submitted it for publication, had it accepted — and thus found himself launched on literary larceny. The days that followed were elevator-like: up one month, down the other. Sandwiched in between gay interludes and ghastly ones, Leslie had to scrape a living. He went back to Malaya and worked on rubber plantations and in a tin mine; he prospected for gold in the jungle, took a whack at pearl fishing; was a seaman on a freighter and toured the English countryside with a sideshow; became a professional bartender and a professional bridge player; came to America in 1932 and found fame and fortune. Out of this rich and varied background emerged the Saint, whose "fierce and fantastic" adventures merely reflect Leslie Charteris's own life, salted with humor, yeasted with imagination, and sugar-coated with a self-confidence that few writers in history have matched. But more of this aspect after you have finished Leslie's prize-winning story . . .*

THE QUARTERDECK CLUB

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE moon was a paste-up job. True, it had come up dripping out of the sea two hours before, but now it hung in the Florida sky like a cut-out from golden paper, and looked down with a bland open countenance on the denizens of Miami Beach and all the visiting firemen therein.

Including wives whose husbands were busy in their offices from Chicago to Boston providing the wherewithal for their helpmeets to fritter

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around; certain characters who went around with thousand-dollar bills in their pockets but never paid any income tax; hopeful gents and girls who felt that one more throw of the dice would get them even with the board again; and Simon Templar and Patricia Holm.

Simon, known as the Saint in varying degrees of love, hate, and envy, lounged behind the wheel of a long low convertible, and pushed that rented job up Collins Avenue at ten miles more than the law allowed. Patricia, her golden head making the moon look like a polished penny, sat easily beside him.

"Simon," she said, "look at that moon. It can't be real."

"Strictly a prop, Pat," the Saint said. "The president of the Chamber of Commerce hangs it up each night."

"If you had any romance in what you call your soul," Patricia complained, "you'd admit it was pretty lush."

"And when we get to the Quarterdeck Club, the atmosphere will be even lusher."

After a contemplative silence, the girl said: "There must be something beyond that, Simon — something that scared Lida Verity half out of her mind. Otherwise, she wouldn't have sounded so desperate on the phone."

"You know her better than I do. Is she the hysterical type?"

"Not even in the Greek meaning of the word," Pat said. "She's a swell gal. Nice family, nice husband in the Navy, plenty of money, and she has her head screwed on tight. She's in trouble, all right."

"Then why didn't she call Sheriff Haskins? . . . Ah, I see things."

"Things" were a Neon sign which read *The Quarterdeck* and a driveway which led through an avenue of royal palms, past a doorway labeled *Gangplank* to a vista of macadam which could have served as the flight deck of an aircraft carrier, but appeared to be used as a parking lot. On this bit of real estate development were parked Cadillacs, Chryslers, Chevrolets, and cars further along in the alphabet, all with the gleaming paint jobs and as far as could be seen in the advertisable moonlight, good tires.

In case any patron might be arriving without a perfectly clean conception of the atmospheric motif of the joint, the requisite keynote was struck immediately by the resplendent personage who advanced to greet them as they pulled up alongside the "gangplank."

"Get a load of the Admiral," Simon observed, as he set the handbrake.

The "Admiral" was one to arouse exclamations. He had more gold braid than an Arabian Nights tapestry, his epaulets raised his shoulder height three inches, his cocked hat probably had John Paul Jones spinning in his grave, and the boots were masterpieces of dully-gleaming leather. His face was square, and hearty and red as fresh beefsteak.

He eyed the Saint and Patricia, resplendent in evening dress, with limited approbation.

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"Ahoy there!" he hailed them, in a restrained bellow. "Have you arranged for your moorings?"

"If by that corny sea-going salutation you mean do we have reservations," the Saint replied, "no. We do not."

"Then I'm sorry, skipper," the Admiral boomed. "You can't drop anchor."

"But Admiral," Pat said, "we drove all the way from —"

"*Very* sorry, Miss. But the harbor's overcrowded already."

"This is Patricia Holm," the Saint said, "and I am Simon Templar."

"Sorry, sir, but it doesn't matter if —" The man gulped, and peered at them more closely. "Templar, did you say?"

"Yes, Simon Templar."

The Admiral removed his hat, mopped at his pink forehead.

"Whew! That was a shot across the bow. I've heard about you, Mr. — er — Sss —"

"Call him Saint," said Patricia. "He likes it."

"But I still can't let you in the Quarterdeck, sir."

"You aren't letting us," the Saint said gently. "But you aren't stopping us, either."

"I wouldn't want to cause any unpleasantness, sir, but —"

"No," the Saint agreed, not so gently. "I wouldn't, if I were you. It *might* be more unpleasant for you than you'd bargained for. Now if you'll just slip anchor and drift to the northwest a trifle —"

"For another thing," Pat put in, "we were invited here."

The Admiral removed his uneasy eyes from the Saint's blue stare. His face broke into a mass of uplifting wrinkles.

"Invited?" he said genially. "Why didn't you *say* so?"

"You didn't ask," the Saint said. "Mrs. Verity asked us to join her.

This name impressed the Admiral. His eyes widened.

"Mrs. Verity? Then come *aboard*!"

"We intended to," the Saint said. "Ready, Pat?"

"Aye, aye, sir. Boarding party, forward."

The Admiral fawned on the Saint more than befited his dignified dress.

"I hope you'll pardon me, sir, for — oh!" Somehow, his hand was convenient for the Saint to reach. His white glove closed around what the Saint put there. "Thank *you*, sir!"

Simon took the girl's arm and steered her along a short companionway, brass-railed on either side, to a doorway which bore a small brass plate: LOUNGE.

The big room fanned out to impressive dimensions in three directions; but it was stocked with enough tables and patrons to avert any impression of bleakness.

On the tables were numbers in patterns, pertaining to dice, roulette, and faro. On the feminine patrons were the fewest glittering scraps permitted by current conventions. Bare back and white ties made a milling chiaroscuro backgrounded by hushed

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murmurs and the plastic chink of chips.

The cash customers, in fact, were the only discrepancy in an otherwise desperately consistent *décor*. The roulette wheels were set in a frame intended to be a ship's wheel. The crap table was a lifeboat, its deck the playing surface. Everywhere was the motif of the sea, polished and brazen. Waiters were dressed as stewards, with *Quarterdeck* embroidered on their gleaming jackets. The cigarette girl was dressed in white shorts, a sailor's cap, and two narrow straps that crossed over her pneumatic bosom. The croupiers wore three-cornered hats emblazoned, aptly, with the Jolly Roger.

Patricia's blue eyes took in the big room one customer at a time.

"I don't see Lida," she said presently. "She said she'd be waiting."

"Probably she's just late," Simon answered. "It has happened to women before." He ignored the daggered glance which his lady launched at him. "Shall we mingle with the élite and lose a fortune in the well-bred fashion of wealthy suckers?"

"The next time I have to wait for you —" Patricia began; and then Simon stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"Don't look now," he said in a low voice, "but something tall, dark, and rancid is coming up on our starboard quarter."

The newcomer wasn't really tall. He stood several inches below the Saint's 74, but he gave the impression of height by his manner: suave, completely poised.

"Good evening," he said, his dark eyes flickering up and down Pat in appreciation. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am Esteban. Welcome to the Quarterdeck."

"How do you do, Esteban?" said the Saint. "Quite well, I guess, from the looks of things."

Esteban smiled, and made a comprehensive gesture at the crowd. "Always there are many people at the Quarterdeck Club. We conduct honest games. But what will you play? Roulette, faro, blackjack?"

"None but the brave *chemin de fer*," murmured the Saint. "It's nice of you to give us a choice of weapons. But as a matter of fact, we're looking for a friend. A Mrs. Verity."

The dark eyes went flat.

"Ah," Esteban said without expression. "Mrs. Verity."

Pat said: "You know her?"

"Who does not, señorita? Of course."

"She's here, isn't she?"

"I am afraid you are to be disappointed. I think Mrs. Verity has gone."

"You *think*?" Simon repeated pointedly. "Did you see her go?"

Esteban shrugged, his face still blank and brown.

"There are so many. It is hard to say."

Simon's stare could have been fashioned in bronze. "You wouldn't be stalling, would you, Esteban?" he asked with gentle deadliness.

"She told us she would wait for us,"

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Pat said. "When did she leave?"

Esteban smiled suddenly, the accommodating host.

"I try to find out for you. Mrs. Verity like to play the big, big stake, take the big risk. Maybe she hit too many times wrong at the blackjack; perhaps she went for more money. . . . Please, will you have a drink on the promenade deck while I make inquiries? Out here . . ."

He ushered them towards French doors that opened on one side of the gaming room, and bowed himself away. The patio was dappled with moonlight and the shadows of palm fronds, but it seemed to have no appeal for the other customers. Simon lighted a cigarette, while Patricia walked to a rail trimmed with unnecessary lifebelts, and gazed out at the vista of landscape ground sloping to the moon-gladed sea.

She caught her breath at the scene, and then shivered slightly.

"It's so beautiful it hurts," she said. "And yet, it seems every time we find a romantic spot like this, there's something . . . I don't know, but this place gives me the creeps."

"Inside," the Saint said, "the creeps are giving to Esteban. I don't know if you'd call that a fair exchange."

He looked up as a waiter arrived.

"Esteban's compliments, sir. Would you and the lady care for anything?"

"Very handsome of Esteban," the Saint said. "We'll have double Manhattans made with a good bourbon, and —"

He broke off as a *splat!* broke the silence in the direction of the sea, seeming to come from a clump of magnolia trees.

"What was that?" Patricia breathed.

"Probably a backfire, miss," the waiter said. "Somebody having trouble with a car."

"On account of driving it into the sea?" Simon said, and swung a leg over the rail.

"Could a motorboat do that?" Pat asked.

"No, darling. Come on."

"About your drinks, sir —"

"Don't put any cherries in them," said the Saint.

He sped down a winding path to the deeply shadowed little grove of trees, white with blossoms that were like wax in the moonlight; and Patricia was only a stride behind him.

It took no searching at all to find the body. It lay sprawled under a tree, half in shadow, staring upward with glazed eyes that would never see again. It was — had been — Lida Verity. She held an automatic pistol in one hand, and under the swell of her left breast was a small dark hole and a spreading stain.

The Saint made a brief examination and knew while he did it that he was only deferring to a conventional routine. There was no doubt now that Lida Verity had had reason to call him, and the line of his mouth was soured by the recollection of his earlier flippancy.

He knew Patricia was only obeying the same inescapable conventions when she said: "Simon — is she —"

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He nodded. "Now she isn't scared any more."

Lida Verity had lived — gaily, indifferently, passionately, thoughtfully, frantically. Her life had echoed with the tinkle of champagne glasses, Mendelssohn's solemnity, the purr of sleek motors, the chatter of roulette frets, before the final sound of a gun in the night had changed the sense of the declarative sentence "I am."

The Saint stood quietly summarizing the available data: the body, the wound, the gun, the time, the place. And as he stood, with Patricia wordless beside him, a whisper of footsteps announced the coming of Esteban.

Simon's eyes hardened as they moved up to the proprietor of that palace of chance in which only the guests took the chance.

"Welcome to the wake, comrade," he said coldly.

Esteban looked over the situation. His expression was impassive, yet his dark eyes were sharp as he added the factors and came up with an answer.

"The waiter told me there was some trouble," he said, exactly like one of his head-waiters dealing with some trivial complaint. "You found her — like this?"

"We did."

"Is she —?"

"You've lost your place in the script," Simon said patiently. "We've already read that line."

"I am sorry," Esteban said bloodlessly. "She was a lovely lady."

"Somebody didn't share your opinion," the Saint said.

The words hung in the quiet night, as if they were three-dimensional, to be touched and turned and examined. The pause lengthened while the Saint lighted a cigarette without taking his eyes off Esteban. His meaning seemed to materialize slowly during the silence.

"But —" Esteban gestured at the body, face upward, black hair glinting in the wash of moonlight. "The gun is in her hand. Surely you cannot mean —"

"She was murdered."

"But that is impossible!" Esteban protested. "It is so obvious, Mr. Templar. It is suicide."

"Lida wouldn't have killed herself!" Patricia said hotly. "She was so — so alive. She wouldn't, I tell you!"

"Madame," Esteban said sadly, "you do not know. She lose much money tonight at the gaming table. Perhaps more than she should."

"How much?" Simon asked bluntly.

Esteban shrugged.

"We do not keep accounts. She buy many chips for the roulette table."

"A few minutes ago you thought 'perhaps' she had been losing at blackjack. Now you seem to know different."

Esteban's shoulders rose another inch.

"You ask me to find out. I accommodate you. And now I go call the Sheriff. I must ask you not to disturb anything."

"I think," the Saint said softly, "that before the evening is out, we shall disturb many things, my friend."

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Esteban went back up the path, and the Saint took Patricia's arm and led her off at a tangent to pass around the outside of the building. He had several more questions to ask, and he thought he knew where to start asking them.

In front of the club the Admiral was admitting new customers on a froth of salt-water argot. He greeted the Saint and Pat with his largest smile.

"Ahoy, mates! Enjoying the trip?"

"That is hardly an accurate description of our emotions at the moment," Simon said. "We're after a little information about an incident that occurred a few moments ago."

"I keep an accurate log, sir. Fire away."

"Did you see Mrs. Verity come out of the club?"

"Aye, that I did, not more than fifteen minutes ago. Fact is, I'd just sounded four bells when she went ashore."

"Why didn't you stop her?" Simon asked sharply. "You knew we were waiting for her."

"Why, shiver my timbers, sir, I supposed she'd already seen you. It's hardly my place to stop the passengers."

"Hmm. I see."

"Did you miss her, sir?"

"We did, but somebody else didn't. They got her dead center."

The Admiral blinked, and seemed to examine the remark for some time. A puzzled frown formed on his round face.

"Blow me down, sir, but your message isn't clear."

"She's dead."

The Admiral's jaw dropped.

"No! Why, she was smiling pretty when she passed me, sir. Gave me a dollar, too. If I'd known she was going to scuttle herself, I'd have made her heave to."

Simon gave him a long speculative stare.

"That's an interesting deduction, chum," he murmured. "When did I say that she killed herself?"

The man blinked.

"Why, what else, sir? Surely nobody would harm a fine lady like Mrs. Verity. Tell me, sir, what did happen?"

"She was shot." The Saint pointed. "On the other side of the building, down towards the beach. Did you notice anyone wandering about outside?"

The Admiral thought, chin in gloved hand.

"No, sir. Only Mrs. Verity. She went off that way, and I supposed she was going to her car."

"But you didn't see her drive out."

"I didn't notice, sir. There were other passengers arriving and leaving at the same time, and I was pretty busy."

"But you noticed that no one else was wandering around."

"That's just my impression, sir. Of course, there's the back way out to the promenade deck too."

The Saint's cigarette glowed brightly again to a measured draw.

"I see. Well, thanks . . ."

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He took Patricia back into the club and located the bar. They sat on high stools and ordered bourbon. Around them continued the formless undertones of the joint, the clink of chips, the rattle of dice, the whir of wheels, the discreet drone of croupiers, the tinkle of ice and glass — a low-key background broken from time to time by the crash of a cocktail mixer or a burst of excited laughter. For the other guests of the Quarterdeck Club life went on, unaware of the visit of Death; and if the employees had heard anything of it, their faces were trained to inscrutability.

"Do you think I'm nuts?" Simon asked presently. "Do you think it was suicide?"

"It doesn't seem possible," Patricia said thoughtfully. "I keep thinking of the dress she was wearing."

Simon regarded her.

"That," he said, with some asperity, "would naturally be the key to the whole thing. Was she correctly dressed for a murder?"

"You idiot," said his lady in exasperation. "That was a Mainbocher — an original! No pretty girl in her right mind would ruin an expensive dress like that by putting a bullet through it. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it."

"But we didn't see it, darling," Simon reminded her gently. "Not with our own eyes."

He put down his glass and found the silent-moving Esteban at his elbow again.

"The Sheriff is here, Mr. Templar. You will please come this way?"

It could have been suspected, from his appearance, that Sheriff Newt Haskins had spent all his life in black alpaca. One must admit that his first article of apparel was probably three-cornered, but he wore the tropical-weight black as if he had never changed his clothes since he got any. He sat with his well-worn but carefully-shined black shoes on Esteban's polished maple desk and welcomed Simon with a mere flick of his keen gray eyes, and Patricia Holm with the rather sad faint smile of a man long past the age when the sight of such beauty would inspire any kind of activity.

"Can't say I'm exactly pleased to see you again, Saint," said Haskins. "How do, Miss Holm." The amenities fulfilled, he turned to Esteban. "Well?"

Esteban shrugged. "I tell you on the phone. You have seen the body?"

"Yep, I saw it. And I'm sure curious," — he looked at the Saint — "Mr. Templar."

"So am I, Sheriff," Simon said easily, "but possibly not about the same thing."

"You admit you came here lookin' for the dead woman, son?"

"Now, daddy," the Saint remonstrated. "You know *I'd* be looking for a live woman."

"Hum," Newt Haskins said. "Reckon so. But the law's found plenty o' dead people around right after you been in the neighborhood. So when I see you here right next to a

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death that's just happened, I kinda naturally start wonderin' how much you know about it."

"I hope you're not suggesting that I murdered her?"

"You done the suggestin', son. That she was murdered, that is. Everything else points to the lady's takin' the hard way out of a jam."

"You don't really believe that, do you?"

"Will you excuse me?" Esteban said. "My guests . . ."

Sheriff Newt Haskins waved a negligent hand.

"Go ahead, Esteban. Call you if I want ya." To the Saint, after Esteban had gone, he said: "He ain't much help."

"Are you sure he couldn't be if he wanted to?"

"Wa'al —" Newt Haskins shrugged his thin shoulders noncommittally. "Let's get back to your last question. Nope, I don't think Mrs. Verity shot herself. Seein's how good-lookin' dames like her hate to disfigure themselves. It's generally gas or sleepin' tablets. Still, you can't say it's never happened."

Pat said: "Think of that little evening bag. Lida wouldn't have carried a gun in that."

Haskins pulled his long upper lip.

"It ain't exactly probably, ma'am," he agreed. "But on the other hand it ain't impossible either."

"Permit me to call your attention," Simon said, "to one thing that is impossible."

"The white thread caught in the trigger guard?" Haskins anticipated blandly. "Yup, I saw that, son."

"You've got good eyes for your age, daddy. It's a white *cotton* thread. Lida Verity was wearing a green *silk* dress. She didn't have anything white on her that I noticed. On the other hand, if someone had wiped the gun with a handkerchief to get rid of fingerprints —"

Haskins nodded, his eyes on Patricia.

"You're wearin' a white jacket thing, Miss Holm."

"This bolero? You can't suggest that *I* —"

"Don't get excited, darling," said the Saint. "The Sheriff is just stirring things up to see what comes to the top."

Haskins held the creases in his leathery face unchanged.

"Any reason, son, why you and Miss Holm shouldn't lay your cards on the table?"

"We always like to know who's staying in the game, daddy. Somebody around this place has a couple of bullets, back to back."

The lanky officer sighed. He picked up a glass paperweight, turned it in bony fingers, gazed into it pensively.

"I guess I'll have to put it to you straight, then."

"A novelty," the Saint said, "from the law. You're going to say that Mrs. Verity was loaded down with moola."

"An' might have been shaken down for some of it. Your crystal ball's workin' almost as good as mine, son . . ."

The Saint looked out into space,

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poising puppets with a brown hand.

"If you'll just concentrate . . . concentrate . . . I may be able to do more — I have it!" He might have expected to get his palm crossed with a silver dollar. "My record leads you to suspect me of a slight tendency towards —"

"Bein' interested in other folks' money."

"Your confidence touches me."

"That ain't all that may be touchin' you soon, son."

"Now you've broken the spell," said the Saint reproachfully. "We are no longer in tune with the infinite. So — it seems as if we may have to leave you with your problem. Unless, of course, you propose to arrest me now and fight it out with my lawyers later."

"Not right away, son. We don't none of us want to be too hasty. But just don't get too far away, or the old police dog might have to start bayin' a trail."

"We'll be around," said the Saint, and ushered Patricia out.

As the murmurous inanities of the public rooms lapped around them again, she glanced up and found his eyes as blue and debonair as if no cares had ever crossed his path. The smile he gave her was as light as gosling down.

"I hardly think," he drawled, "that we have bothered Señor Esteban enough. Would'st care to join me?"

"Try and lose me," said the girl.

They found Esteban keeping a weather eye on the play of his guests, and followed his politely lifted brows to the patio.

"The moonlight, she is so beautiful," Esteban said, with all the earnestness of a swing fan discussing Handel. "Did the Sheriff let you go?"

"Like he let you — on probation," Simon answered cheerfully. "He just told us to stick around."

The man formed insolent question marks with the corners of his mouth. "I did not think you would care to stay here after your friend kill herself."

"I heard you the first time, Esteban. I'm sure if your customers have to die on the premises, you'd much rather have a Monte Carlo suicide than a murder. It wouldn't scare half so many suckers away. But we happen to know that Mrs. Verity wasn't the sort to be worried about being blackjacked out of a few hundreds, or even thousands, in this kind of clip joint."

There was no reaction in the dark lizard eyes.

"You hint at something, maybe?"

"I hint at nothing, maybe. I'm still asking questions. And one thing I've been wondering about — who did she come here with?"

Esteban repeated, without inflection: "Who did she come here with?"

"She wouldn't have come here alone," said Patricia. "She didn't come with her husband, because he's still in Tokio. So — who?"

"A little while ago, madame, you tell me she come here to meet you."

"Tonight, perhaps," Simon admitted patiently. "But this wasn't her

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first visit. The Admiral of the watch seemed to know her quite well. So who did she *usually* come with?"

Esteban shrugged. "I do not inquire about these things."

The Saint's voice became rather gentle.

"Comrade, you don't seem to get the point. I'm a guy who might make a great deal of trouble for you. On the other hand, I might save you a lot."

Esteban took note of the steady blue eyes, the deceptive smile that played across the Saint's chiseled mouth. He forced a laugh.

"You frighten me terribly, Señor."

"But you don't frighten me, Don Esteban. Because whatever Sheriff Haskins may think, I have the advantage of knowing that I had nothing to do with killing Mrs. Verity. Which leaves me with a clear head to concentrate on finding out who did. So if you don't cooperate, I can only draw one conclusion."

There was silence, save for the rustle of palm fronds and the thud and hiss of the surf — and the muffled sounds of the Quarterdeck doing business as usual.

At last Esteban said craftily: "What will you do if I help you?"

"That depends on how much you know and how much you tell. I don't mind admitting that Miss Holm and I are slightly allergic to people who kill our friends. Also, it wouldn't bother me a bit if the Sheriff closed your parcheesi parlor. You ought to know how much you've really got to be scared of."

Esteban seemed to give him the same poker-faced appraisal that he would have made on a new customer who wanted to cash a check. And with the same impenetrable decisiveness he said: "Mrs. Verity come here with Mr. Maurice Kerr. He is what you call a — ah, playboy. A leetle old, perhaps, but most charming. Perhaps you should ask him your questions. If you wait, I tell you where he lives."

The address he came back with was only a half-mile south, on a side street off Collins Avenue. There were still lights in the house when the Saint's car pulled up, a mere matter of minutes later; and a man who could only have been Kerr himself, in white tie and a smoking jacket, opened the door to the Saint's casual knock. His somewhat florid face peered out under the porch light with strictly reasonable ineffusiveness.

He said: "What do you want? Who are you?" But his tone was still genial enough to be described as charming.

"A moment with you, Mr. Maurice Kerr," the Saint answered. "You may call me the Saint — temporarily. Before we're through with you, you may think of some other names. And this is Miss Holm."

Kerr's eyebrows rose like levitating gray bushes.

"I don't pretend to understand you."

"May we come in? This is a matter of life and death."

Kerr hesitated, frowned, then swung the door wide.

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"Do. In here, in the library."

The library was lighted for the benefit of those who liked to read comfortably at the least expense to their eyesight. The walls were lined with books, an artificial fire flickered in the fireplace, and chairs, lovingly fashioned to fit the human form, were spaced at tasty intervals.

"Sit down," Kerr invited graciously. "What is this all about?"

Simon remained standing. He put his lighter to a cigarette and said: "Our spies tell us that you went to the Quarterdeck Club with Lida Verity tonight."

He risked the exaggeration intentionally and saw it pay off as Kerr paused to pick up the highball which he had obviously put down when they knocked.

Kerr sipped the drink, looked at the Saint. "Yes?"

"Why did you leave the club without her?"

"May I ask what that has to do with you?"

"Lida was a friend of mine," Patricia said. "She asked us to help her."

"Just before she died," the Saint said.

Kerr's soft, manicured hand tightened around his glass. His dark eyes swung like pendulums between the Saint and the lady. He didn't catch his breath — quite; and the Saint wondered why.

"But that's ghastly!" Kerr's voice expressed repugnance, shock, and semi-disbelief. "She — she lost too much?"

"Meaning?" the Saint asked.

"She killed herself, of course."

"Lida," Simon explained, "was shot through the heart on the grounds of the Quarterdeck Club."

"You're trying to frighten me," Kerr said. "Lida couldn't have been —"

"Who said so? Who told you she committed suicide?"

"Why, why — it was just a —" Kerr broke off. "I don't know what you're talking about."

The Saint did not actually groan out loud, but the impulse was there.

"I can't understand why this is always happening to me," he complained. "I thought I spoke reasonably good English. The idea should be easy to grasp. All I told you was that Lida Verity was dead. You immediately assumed that she'd committed suicide. Statistics show that suicide is a helluva long way from being the most common way to die. Therefore the probability is that something or someone specifically gave you that idea. Either you knew that she might have had good reason to commit suicide or somebody else has already talked to you. Whichever it is, I want to know about it."

Kerr licked his lips. "I fail to see what right you have to come here and cross-examine me," he said, but his voice was not quite as positive as the words.

"Let's not make it a matter of rights," said the Saint easily. "Let's put it down to my fatal bigness of heart. I'm giving you the chance to talk to

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me before you talk to the Sheriff. And you'll certainly have to talk to the Sheriff if the gun that Lida was shot with happens to be registered in your name."

It was a shot in the dark, but it seemed to be worth taking; and Simon felt an inward leap of optimism as he saw that at least he had come close to his mark. Kerr's hand jumped involuntarily so that the ice in his highball gave a sharp tinkle against the glass, and his face turned a couple of shades lighter in color.

"What sort of gun was she shot with?"

"A thirty-two Colt automatic."

Kerr took it with his eyes. There was a long moment's silence while he seemed to search either for something to say or for the voice to say it.

"It could have been my gun." He formed the words at last. "I lent it to her this evening."

"Oh?"

"She asked me if I had a gun I could lend her."

"Why did you let her have it if you thought she was going to shoot herself?"

"I didn't think so at the time. She told me she was going to meet someone she was scared of, but she didn't tell me who it was, and she wouldn't let me stay with her. She was rather overwrought and very mysterious about it. I couldn't get anything out of her. But I never thought about suicide — then."

Simon's blue eyes held him relentlessly through a drift of cigarette smoke.

"And that," said the Saint, "answers just half my question. So you weren't thinking about suicide. So somebody told you. Who?"

Muscles twitched sullenly over Kerr's brows and around the sides of his mouth.

"I fail to see —"

"Let me help you," said the Saint patiently. "Lida Verity didn't commit suicide. She was murdered. It wasn't even planned to look like suicide. This unanimous eagerness to brush it off as a suicide was just an afterthought, and not a very brilliant one either. The Sheriff doesn't believe it and I don't believe it. But there's one difference between the Sheriff and me. I may be a red herring to him, but I'm not a red herring to myself. I *know* this is one killing I didn't do. So I've got a perfectly clear head to concentrate on finding out who did it. If anyone seems to be stalling or holding out on me, the only conclusion I can come to is that they're either guilty themselves or covering up for a guilty pal. In either case I'm not going to feel very friendly about it. And that brings us to another difference between the Sheriff and me. When I don't feel friendly about people, I'm not tied down by a lot of red tape and pettifogging legal procedures. As you may have heard. If you are covering up for a pal he must mean a lot to you — if you're willing to let me hang *you* for *him*."

Kerr took another sip of his drink. It was a long sip, turning gradually into a gulp. When he set down his

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glass, the last pretense of dignified obstinacy had gone out of him.

"I did have a phone call from one of the men at the club," he admitted.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know exactly. He said: 'The Saint's on his way to see you. Mrs. Verity just shot herself here. Esteban says to tell you not to talk.' "

"Why should this character expect you to do what Esteban told you?"

Kerr fidgeted. "I work for Esteban, in a sort of way."

"As a shill?" Simon inquired.

The other flushed. "I bring people to the club and I get a small commission on the business. It's perfectly legitimate."

"It would be in a legitimate business. So you shill for the joint. You latch on to visiting pigeons around town and steer them in to be plucked." Simon studied him critically. "Times must be getting tough, Maurice. I seem to remember that you used to do much better marrying them occasionally and getting a nice settlement before they divorced you."

"That's neither here nor there," Kerr said redly. "I've told you everything I know. I've never been mixed up with murder, and I don't want to be."

The Saint's cigarette rose to a last steady glow before he let it drop into an ashtray.

"Whether you want it or not, you are," he said. "But we'll take the best care we can of your tattered reputation."

He held out his hand to Patricia and helped her up; and they went out and left Maurice Kerr on his own doorstep, looking like a rather sullen and perturbed penguin, with an empty glass still clutched in his hand.

"And that," said Patricia, as the Saint nursed his car around a couple of quiet blocks and launched it into the southbound stream of Collins Avenue, "might be an object lesson to Dr. Watson, but I left my dictionary at home."

The Saint dipped two fingers into the open pack in his breast pocket, and his smile tightened over the cigarette as he reached forward to press the dashboard lighter.

"Aside from the fact that you're much too beautiful to share an apartment safely with Mr. Holmes," he said, "what seems to bother you now?"

"Why did you leave Kerr like that? He's working for Esteban. He told you so himself. He was telling you the story that Esteban told him to tell — you even made him admit that. And Lida seems to have been shot with his gun. It's all too obvious."

Simon nodded, his eyes on the road.

"That's the whole trouble," he said. "It's all too obvious. But if she really was shot with Kerr's gun — which seems to be as certain as any guess can be — why did the guy leave it behind to lay a trail straight to his doorstep? He may be a poop, but can you believe that he's that half-witted? There's nothing in his record to show that he had softening of the brain before. A guy who can work his way

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through four rich wives in ten years may not be the most desirable character on earth, but he has to have something on the ball. Most of these over-bank-balanced broads have been around too."

Patricia fingered strands of golden hair out of her eyes.

"He doesn't sound like the dream-boy of all time," she said. "I can imagine how Dick Verity would like to hear that Lida and Maurice were a steady twosome." Her eyes turned to him with a sudden widening. "Simon, do you think —"

"That there was blackmail in it?" The Saint's face was dark and cold. "Yes, darling, I think we're getting closer. But I don't see the fine hand of Maurice in it. A man with his technique doesn't suddenly have to resort to anything so crude as murder. But you meet all kinds of types at the Quarterdeck Club — and I think we belong there."

The moon was the same, and the rustle of palm fronds along the tall dark margins of the road, but the night's invitation to romance had turned into something colder that enclosed them in a bubble of silence which only broke on the eventually uprising neons of the Quarterdeck Club and the hurricane voice of the Admiral.

"Avast there!" he bellowed, as the car came to a stop. "My orders are to repel boarders."

Simon opened the door and swung out a long leg.

"A noble duty, Horatio," he murmured, "but we belong here — remember? The Sheriff wouldn't like it if he thought we'd jumped ship."

The Admiral stood firmly planted in his path. His face was no longer ruddily friendly, and his eyes were half-shuttered.

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't know how you were able to disembark, but my orders —"

That was as far as he got, for at that moment the precise section of his anatomy known to prizefighting adepts as the button came into unexpectedly violent contact with an iron fist which happened at that moment, by some strange coincidence, to be traveling upwards at rocket speed. For one brief instant the Admiral enjoyed an entirely private display of fireworks of astonishing brilliance, and thereupon lost interest in all mundane phenomena.

The Saint caught him as he crumpled and eased his descent to the gravel. There was no other movement in the parking lot, and the slow drumming of the distant surf blended with a faint filtration of music from inside the club to overlay the scene with the beguiling placidity of a nocturne. Simon took another grip and heaved the Admiral quite gently into the deeper shadows of some shrubbery, where he began to bind and gag him deftly with the Admiral's own handkerchief, necktie, and suspenders.

"You, too, can be a fine figure of a man, bursting with vibrant health and superstrength," recited Patricia. "Send for our free booklet — *They*

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Laughed When I Talked Back to the Truck Driver."

"If Mary Livingstone ever loses her voice, you can get a job with Jack Benny," said the Saint. "Now while I finish this up, will you be a good girl and go in and engage Esteban in dulcet converse — with his back to the door. I'll be with you in two seconds."

To be drearily accurate, it was actually sixty-eight seconds later when the Saint entered the gaming room again. He found Esteban facing a vivacious Pat, and it was clear from his back that it would take something rather important to drag him away from her.

The Saint was able to provide this. It manifested itself as a pressure in the center of Esteban's spine.

"This isn't my pipe, Esteban," he breathed in the entrepreneur's ear. "Shall we adjourn to your private office, or would you like bits of your sacroiliac all over the joint?"

Esteban said nothing. He led the way, with the Saint walking apparently arm-in-arm with him, and Pat still chattering on the other side.

"— and I am going to write to my mother, Mr. Esteban, and tell her what a romantic place you —"

"Now we can wash this up," the Saint said.

He closed the door behind them. Esteban stood very still.

"What do you expect this to get you, Mr. Templar?"

"A peek in your safe," said the Saint softly.

"The safe is locked."

"This is still the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Sacroiliacs," Simon reminded him. "The safe can be unlocked."

"You wouldn't dare to shoot!"

"Not until I count to three, I wouldn't. It's a superstition with me. One . . . two . . ."

"Very well," Esteban said.

Little beads of sweat stood on his olive brow as he went to the wall safe and twirled the dial.

Simon handed his gun to Pat.

"Cover him. If he tries anything, shoot him in his posterity." He added to Esteban: "She will, too."

Esteban stood to one side as the Saint emptied the safe of bundles of currency, account books, and sheaves of businesslike papers. He was pleased to find that Esteban was a neat and methodical man. It made the search so much quicker and easier. He had known before he started what kind of thing he was looking for, and there were not too many places to look for it. He was intent and efficient, implacable as an auditor, with none of the lazy flippancy that normally glossed his purposes.

Another voice spoke from the doorway behind him.

"So we're havin' a party. Put that gun down, Miss Holm. What would all this be about, son?"

"Come on in, daddy," he said. "I was just deciding who you were going to arrest."

Esteban's sudden laugh was sharp with relief.

"I think, my friend, the Sheriff

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knows that already. Mr. Haskins, I shall be glad to help you with my evidence. They stick me up in my own club, bring me in here, and force me to open the safe. Fortunately you catch them red-handed."

"That's a hell of a way to talk about a guy who's just going to save your worthless neck," said the Saint.

Newt Haskins pushed his black hat onto the back of his head.

"This had shuah better make a good story, son," he observed. "But I'm listenin'."

"It wasn't too hard to work out," Simon said seriously. "Lida Verity was being blackmailed, of course. That's why she told us she was in trouble, instead of calling on you. Blackmail has been a side-line in this joint for some time — and a good hunting-ground this must be for it, too. This town is always full of wives vacationing from their husbands, and vice versa, and the climate is liable to make them careless. Somebody stooging around this joint could build up interesting dossiers on a lot of people. In fact, somebody did."

He took a small notebook from his pocket.

"Here it is. Names, dates, details. Items that could be plenty embarrassing if they were used in the wrong way. I'm going to rely on your professional discretion to see that it's destroyed when you're through with it."

"He's trying to pull the fast one!" Esteban burst out. "He never found such a book in my safe —"

"I didn't say I did," Simon responded calmly. "I found it on somebody else. But since you were the most obvious person to be behind the operation, I wanted to nose around in your safe to see if there was anything in it that would confirm or deny. I'm afraid the results let you out. There doesn't seem to be anything that even remotely connects you. On the other hand, I found this."

He handed Haskins a slip of paper, and the Sheriff squinted at it with his shrewd gray eyes.

"Seems to be a check made out to Esteban," Haskins said. "It says on the voucher 'January installment on car park concession'. What do you figger that means, son?"

"It means that if the Admiral was paying Esteban for the car park concession, Esteban could hardly have been using him as part of a blackmail racket. Otherwise the pay-off would have gone the other way. And certainly it would if the Admiral had been doing Esteban's dirty work when he killed Lida Verity."

"The Admiral!" Patricia exclaimed.

Simon nodded.

"Of course. Our corny nautical character. He never missed anything that went on here — including Mrs. Verity's rather foolish affair with a superior gigolo and shill named Maurice Kerr. Only she didn't sit still for blackmail. I guess she told the Admiral she was going to have me take care of him, and she may even have tried to scare him with the gun she'd borrowed. He got mad or lost his head

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and grabbed the gun and shot her." The Saint dipped in his pocket again. "Here are the white gloves he always wore. You'll notice that there's a tear in one of them. I'm betting that the thread you found in that trigger guard can be proved to have pulled out of that glove."

Haskins turned the gloves over in his bony hands and brought his eyes slowly back to the Saint.

"Reckon you done another good job, Saint," he conceded peacefully. "We'll soon know . . . An' this heah Esteban, he ought to stake you with blue chips all night for lettin' him out."

"Letting me out!" Esteban echoed indignantly. The enormity of the injustice done to him grew visibly in his mind, finding voice in a crescendo of righteous resentment. "I tell the world I am let out! That Admiral, he makes agreement with me to pay me half of everything he makes from the concession. And he never tells me — the peeg! — he never tells me anything about this blackmail at all!"

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *When a writer has created a world-famous character, we think of that character as a pure figment of the author's imagination. It is seldom true. Psychologically, it is impossible for a fictional hero, especially one who persists through a long series of books, to be the unalloyed invention of a writer's mind. The writer himself creeps into the character. Usually it takes the form of idealization — a dream-figure representing what the writer would like to be. Not that famous characters lack faults and foibles: the clever writer deliberately exploits the value of realism by adding idiosyncrasies, eccentricities, and all-too-human failings. In essence, however, the protagonist in print is the creator himself, usually seen through rose-colored glasses.*

To prove how susceptible an author becomes to his own brain-child, how easily the creator and the creation become indistinguishable, suppose we cite a few oblique and direct instances. Take the history of some of the radio actors who have played Ellery Queen on the air. Here we are dealing not with the originator of the character but with the interpreter — and yet the same self-identification takes place. We were shocked one first-of-a-month to receive a score of bills from department stores and men's furnishing establishments for suits, shirts, shoes, and sundries, all charged to Ellery Queen. The curious fact was that we had never purchased any of the items listed. Naturally, we checked with the business firms in question, only to learn that a man calling himself Ellery Queen had opened the charge accounts and selected all the articles in person. Investigation revealed that the man who at that time played the radio part of Ellery

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Queen had come to think of himself so realistically as Ellery Queen that he had stepped over the borderline of mere play-acting and had become Ellery Queen in the flesh. It is only fair to say that this particular radio actor had no intention whatever to defraud — he paid all the bills out of his own pocket. Nevertheless, it was our painful duty to remind him of his true identity and caution him against ever again assuming a dual personality that infringed on our duly copyrighted character. But we've often wondered if the shirts he ordered were monogrammed and if the monogram was EQ.

Another radio actor showed his self-identification with our brain-child in a different way. This actor was once asked if he would give a talk to a large group of children at Carnegie Hall. The actor agreed, with the incredible provision that he be introduced to his audience not under his own name but as Ellery Queen. No one involved — not the actor or the producer or anyone connected with Carnegie Hall — ever dreamed of securing the permission of the real Ellery Queen, and on the appointed day placards on the walls of Carnegie Hall announced that Ellery Queen in person was making a public appearance. The actor gave a reading, which the children ate up, and then proceeded to lecture on the subject that Crime Does Not Pay. When informed in no uncertain terms that he had committed the crime of impersonation, the actor was both amazed and resentful. Why, he had done no harm — indeed, in his opinion, he had done the real Ellery Queen a favor! Hadn't he been the instrument of considerable publicity? Hadn't he been photographed? How could the real Ellery Queen be offended? Why, we should be grateful! When we pointed out that there was one small error in the proceedings — the small matter of the wrong person having been publicized and photographed — the actor woke up with a start and his dream was suddenly shattered.

These are two indirect examples, but they prove how subtle and indiscernible is the metamorphosis from fancy to fact. In a way it is simply a variation of the old Pygmalion theme. We have observed more than one case of an author falling in love with his own character. There have been times in our presence when we would have sworn that Dashiell Hammett was acting like and talking like Sam Spade. And there have been times when we have seen Brett Halliday the real-life embodiment of Mike Shayne.

We have never actually met Leslie Charteris face to face. But we have heard fabulous stories about him — stories that have never failed to fascinate us. Leslie is one of the very few detective-story writers who is entitled to be called a legend in his own time. And from the tall tales we have heard of Leslie's background, work habits, and personality,

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we have almost come to believe that Leslie Charteris never invented a character called the Saint, that there is no such character at all. That is, no such character. *The Saint exists — there's no doubt of that. But the truth, the real truth, is staggeringly simple: the Saint is not Simon Templar — he is Leslie Charteris!*

In our mind's eye we see Leslie as dashing and debonair, audacious and awe-inspiring, exuberant and extravagant, swashbuckling and swaggering — that romantic rogue, that brighter buccaneer, the very Saint himself. And we wonder why on earth Leslie himself didn't play the Saint in the movies, why Leslie himself didn't enact the radio rôle. Perhaps one of these days the Saint will make his début on the stage. If he does, we'll be there opening night, front row center. And we'll make a bet right now that it will not be the Saint who walks out on the stage — it will be Leslie Charteris in person!

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Brett Halliday's first short story to appear in EQMM was that memorable tale, "Human Interest Stuff," in our issue of September 1946. It was not a Mike Shayne toughie; it was not something dreamed up in a fiction writer's imagination. Rather, it was a realistically tough yarn about railroad construction south of the Rio Grande; or, to paraphrase the author's own title, it was "Human Being Stuff" — in the truest meaning of the words.

Now we bring you another of Brett Halliday's engineering stories, and as an editorial introduction to it we give you a testimonial by "one of the Big Five" in detectivedom, John Dickson Carr. The eminent creator of detectives Dr. Gideon Fell and H. M. wrote: "When I swear that one of the best stories you have ever published is Brett Halliday's 'Human Interest Stuff,' you will agree that I have no objection to the hard-boiled school as such. I object to it when it is phony or pretentious, as it nearly always is. 'Human Interest Stuff' rings true. You believe in it. Furthermore, on the technical side it is done with such skill that a second reading shows it even better than the first: every word leading up to the trick ending is fair."

You will find Brett Halliday's "Big Shot" cut out of exactly the same cloth . . .

BIG SHOT

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Got a match? Thanks, mister. I started out with a handful this morning, but this waiting around for things to get started uses up lots of matches.

Me, a reporter? No. I'm just what you might call an interested spectator. I knew Charlie Morton fifteen years ago — before he got so important — and when I read about the big doings here this morning, I had to come and put in my cheer when Charlie steps onto the top rung of the ladder I started him up fifteen years ago.

No. Charlie doesn't even know I'm here. I'm not very important compared to the governor and the bigshots from Washington up on the front row.

You see, I've stayed a mine foreman while Charlie's been getting ahead. I've been clipping pieces out of the papers about him, watching him come into public notice in a big way these last few years.

He's had this coming to him a long time. When he steps up on that platform in front of all these important people, it won't be any more than he deserves.

Fifteen years is a long time, but

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Charlie Morton's come a long way since I knew him down in the state of Durango. He was just a kid out of college with his degree in mining engineering when he came to the mine in the Sierra Madres.

You didn't know Charlie was a mining engineer? He was. And a good one. But he had too much ambition to be satisfied with engineering. That's why he's where he is today.

In a way, I had a lot to do with giving Charlie his first big boost. I don't take any credit for it — it just happened that way. Every man has to get his start, and it was in the cards that I should give Charlie his big chance.

A story? You bet your sweet life it's a story. Not one I'd want printed, though. When a man stands where Charlie's going to stand this morning, there's no use digging something out of his past to take away from the headlines he'll be getting.

Okay. If you'll forget it after it's told. There'll be just about time before the ceremony starts. Give me another match and I'll spill the yarn . . . which'll give you an idea of why I couldn't stay away this morning.

I was working a gold mine down in Durango. Those were ticklish days for Americans below the Border. Mexico was just beginning to wake up to a sort of national consciousness. Foreigners had been raping her natural resources ever since Cortez started the ball rolling four hundred years ago, and they were just beginning to realize there wouldn't be any Mexico left if the gutting wasn't stopped.

They were setting up a howl of "Mexico for Mexicans," and started passing laws which finally led to the taking over of all the foreign-owned oil properties a few months ago.

Those days, government regulation was pretty much of a farce. You didn't know where you stood from one day to the next. You paid bribe money to one man today — and tomorrow, like as not, he'd be lying by an *adobe* wall full of lead while another guy held out his hand to you.

We had just struck a rich quartz vein in the mountains west of Querzica after prospecting it for two years, but we were up against it when it came to getting the ore out.

There was a big stamp-mill at Durango, but we couldn't ship to it because they were confiscating any foreign-owned ore that came in. It couldn't be shipped out of Mexico openly, either, and raw ore is pretty bulky stuff to smuggle over the line.

The only answer was to set up a little stamp-mill at the mine, crush the high-grade and sluice out whatever free gold we could save; make one cleanup and get out of the country with it before the Mexicans found out what was going on.

It looked fairly safe. We were located twenty miles from Querzica, with only a pack trail leading in. I had a gang of tight-mouthed hard-rock men, and I wrote the owner in the States to ship in an unassembled stamp-mill and an engineer to run it.

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We got out rock while the mill was being shipped in, tons of quartz rotten with free gold, following a vein that widened and showed more values as we drove our drift into the mountain. We mucked it out in wheelbarrows and dumped it by the side of a stream while we waited for the machinery that would work it down to a size we could smuggle out easily.

Charlie Morton came in with the last packing case of mill machinery. A tow-headed youngster with gray eyes that could turn green. He was dressed like a dude mining-engineer, and looked like a softy.

Yeah. That face of his has fooled other men since. People think he's an easy mark and don't find out different until it's too late.

We found out right quick that the softness of him was all on the surface.

Hard-rock men are funny. They don't think much of engineers that've learned their mining out of books. I put Joe Logan and his mucker, Slim, to helping Charlie assemble the mill that first day.

Joe was like any hard-rock miner: he'd work his guts out in a slimy cold tunnel, but it griped the hell out of him to go out into the clean sunlight to be bossed by a kid like Charlie.

They had some words on the job, and came into the cook-tent for supper with hard feelings smouldering between them.

The fellows started ribbing Joe as soon as he sat down to chuck — about being a carpenter, now, and whether he'd had any trouble finding a left-handed monkey wrench, and such.

Joe got snarly about it, and Charlie made the big mistake of speaking up for him.

"Logan did fine," he told them. "I never saw a man catch on so quick."

Logan really clouded up at that. He had a long scar on his cheek where he'd gotten the boot in some fight, and it turned red while the rest of his face was white. He turned on Charlie and snarled:

"Keep outa this, punk."

You don't get it, huh? Well, Charlie didn't either. He thought he was doing Logan a favor by speaking up for him. As if a hard-rock miner wanted any favors from a kid that wasn't dry behind the ears.

Charlie walked right into trouble by flushing up and saying: "I don't see why *I* should keep out of it."

"You don't, huh? Come outside and I'll show yuh."

The kid came to his feet like a shot, a flicker of green in his eyes.

He was outside in front of Joe Logan — with the rest of us pushing out to see him get whipped — Joe being plenty tough in a rough and tumble.

Not tough enough, though.

The kid fought like a killer. That's all I could think of while I watched him take Joe Logan apart.

It wasn't like one of these storybook fights where the college boy fights clean and outboxes the bully. Charlie knew a few kneeing and gouging tricks himself.

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They were fighting near the edge of a steep gulley, and it ended with Joe going over the edge all of a sudden.

It was a long fall, and Joe's neck was broke when we brought him up from the bottom.

Charlie went back and finished supper while we buried Joe out on the hillside.

Figure it out for yourself. I'm just telling you what I saw happen. It gives you an idea of what put Charlie up where he is today. Cold nerve — and no regrets.

He knew his stuff on the job, too. The mill went up in a hurry. He rigged up a water wheel for power, carrying the water on down over a sluice box, and he had the whole thing running inside of a week. Then he piddled around with a gravity-pulled conveyor belt, and in another week was running the whole shebang.

We cleaned the riffles every other day, and stored the take in a metal locker trunk that I cleaned out for it. On a rough guess, we had fifty thousand waiting to be milled, and the vein showed no sign of pinching or a fault.

It was quiet and peaceful on the mountainside above Querzica. There were rumors of revolutions and bandit raids floating through the country, but we were off to ourselves and I wasn't worrying. The Mexicans thought we were just crazy gringo prospectors, and didn't have any idea we were taking the real stuff out right under their noses.

Then Charlie got hepped on a Mex girl in Querzica.

It was my fault, in a way. I made the mistake of sending him in for supplies one Saturday. He was milling the rock faster than we could take it out, and I could spare him better than one of my miners.

It was a long day's trip down the trail with pack mules, and we didn't look for him back until late Sunday.

But he didn't show up Sunday. Nor Monday. It was Tuesday afternoon when he came up the trail with our supplies. I'd been worried about him, and I was sore. I jumped him when he dragged in.

He put his hands on his hips, and his eyes began to turn green.

"I got drunk." He said it slow and cold. Take it or leave it. "I didn't feel like hitting the trail until this morning."

Yeah. That put it right up to me. It was my move. He knew I needed him on the job — that none of the rest of us could mill the rock.

The sun was hot on us, but I felt cold. A clammy feeling that started down in the pit of my belly and spread over me. Looking past him, I saw the cross we had put up over Joe Logan's grave.

Laugh it off if you want to, mister, but that's the way it was. Me, I've stayed alive this long by knowing when to pull in my neck. I said: "Well, I don't blame a man for getting drunk — once. But I'll send another man for supplies next week."

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Charlie said: "I'll be going in. I've got a date for next Saturday night."

Which is just another tip-off on the way Charlie Morton was built. He had me on the run and he was taking all he could get.

I said: "A date? In Querzica?" And I tried to laugh it off. But my mouth was dry and the laugh was a sort of thin cackle.

Charlie's jaw was stuck out. He said: "There's a girl named Lolita and she's expecting me back next Saturday."

Sure. I was the boss. I should've clamped down on the kid. But how was I to know? A Mex girl named Lolita didn't sound dangerous. And Charlie had the mill running so smooth that we didn't need him on the job more than two or three days a week.

It put me in a tough spot. I wanted to get the gold out while the getting was good — before the Mexicans got curious and investigated. I couldn't afford to fire Charlie and lose time sending back to the States for another mill-man.

Charlie knew that. He had all the angles figured. He knew I'd go a long way to avoid trouble.

I sidestepped. I didn't say yes or no. But Charlie went in for supplies and to keep his date the next Saturday. And didn't get back until Tuesday.

He cleaned up the dump that week, which left no real good reason for keeping him lying around camp idle while I pulled off a miner to go into Querzica — so Charlie kept on going in.

And we were chasing the vein into the mountain, working two twelve-hour shifts, really taking out the high grade and piling up gold in the locker trunk.

Charlie began bringing back stories that worried me. Through Lolita, he was getting friendly with the other natives, and by keeping his ears open he was getting the sort of lowdown that they wouldn't give most Americans.

A bandit they called *El Chico* was beginning to get ideas of making himself a second Pancho Villa. Starting out with a few hard-riding *vaqueros*, he was gradually building himself up an army that had to be fed. That meant bigger and bolder raids to keep them satisfied, with more recruits coming to him after each new raid.

A thing like that could only happen in Mexico where the *peons* were so starved that they'd follow anyone who could furnish them *tortillas* and *frijoles*. It's the way revolutions are born. Once started, it gathers momentum like a snowball rolling down hill.

It went that way with Pancho Villa — and from the stories Charlie brought back from Querzica, it was going that way with *El Chico*. He picked on Americans for his victims, which put him ace-high with his followers, and he was raising a wave of patriotism by promising to run all the accursed gringos out of Mexico

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if they would join up with him.

It sounded bad, but we were pretty well isolated back in the mountains and I felt fairly safe from a raid unless *El Chico* got wind of what we were actually doing.

That, I knew, would be too bad for us. Ready money is the one thing bandits like *El Chico* need most and have the hardest time getting. Our cache of gold would buy ammunition and rifles for a lot of his men.

And he would be hailed as a national hero if he stole it from a bunch of gringos who were trying to take it out of the country illegally.

I told Charlie just how it was, the next time he went to town. I told him to go ahead keeping his ears wide open, but to keep his mouth tight shut. When a guy like *El Chico* starts riding, you don't know who you can trust.

And I began doing some heavy figuring on how to get the stuff out of Mexico after we had the lode cleaned up.

In the beginning, I'd planned to hit out northward across country to the Arizona border. An easy hike up through Chihuahua and Sonora. But that was the heart of the country that *El Chico* was rousing to arms against the gringos. We wouldn't have much chance of getting our gold out that way if the stories about *El Chico* were true.

On the other hand, we weren't more than two hundred miles from the west coast of Sinaloa — and that two hundred miles would avoid *El Chico's* territory. By arranging to have a boat spotted in a deserted inlet between Point Plastla and Mazatlan at the appointed time, we'd get our loot out of the country clean and easy.

Except that we were on the wrong side of the Sierra Madre range. If we could get over the divide, it would be easy sailing down to the coast.

The Sierra Madres in Durango are rugged and treacherous. Not very high, but criss-crossed with deep chasms that are practically impassable without a guide.

We were camped on the eastern rim of one such gulley. Three hundred feet to the bottom and a good eighty feet across. Even if we could figure a way to get across that first canyon, we were likely to run into others just like it, trying to get to the coast.

It looked as though we were bottled up as long as *El Chico* had us blocked to the north.

Then Charlie came back from town with a map of an old wagon road across the mountains. It started from Querzica and hit across a low pass just about opposite our camp. He had bought it from an old Mexican in Querzica for five *pesos*, and it looked good to me.

"All we got to do now," I told Charlie when he showed the map to me, "is figure a way to get across this first canyon. From the map, it looks like we'd hit the old road about five miles due west."

Maybe I sounded sarcastic. Building wings for men and mules was the

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only way I saw of getting across the canyon.

Sitting across from me under the glare of a gasoline lantern, Charlie didn't seem to notice my sarcasm. He rolled a cigarette and said:

"That's easy."

"Yeah?" I stared at him, wondering if the *tequila* he'd been swilling in Querzica had him goofy.

He said, "Yeah" like he meant it.

There was something about him that kept me from making the mistake of laughing out loud. I said: "I'm ready to hear any ideas you got on the subject."

"Why not throw a bridge across?"

He said it casually, like you'd ask why not have another biscuit for breakfast.

I knew, then, he must be a little off. It would take a construction gang six months to put a bridge across a gap like that. I told him so, without getting tough because his eyes were beginning to get that greenish glitter in them again.

His lips curled a little when I got through. He blew out a puff of smoke and said:

"It's a good thing you've got an engineer on the job. I'll put a bridge across there in three days."

That's what he said, mister. And that's what he did. I'm telling you that Charlie Morton had the right stuff inside of him at the very beginning. He was one of those engineers that you don't see very often. He couldn't only figure things on paper, but he could *do* them too.

We didn't say any more about it that night, but Charlie went to work on his own hook the next morning. With the end of a two-hundred foot length of rope tied around his waist, he took a pulley with him and started down to the bottom.

It took him all day to make it up the other side, where he tied his pulley to the trunk of a jack pine, drew the rope through tight against the knot on the other end, made a bowknot against the pulley so it would hold the strain, then came back hand over hand.

We had two drums of steel hoisting cable that hadn't been used. With his rope strung across through a pulley, it wasn't any job to drag a cable over, which he set into the opposite rim with an eyebolt drilled into the solid rock.

He did the same on the near side, set two more eyebolts ten feet from the others, and had his two cables strung tight by the end of the second day.

Notching ten-foot two-by-fours for cross-bracing spreaders, he strung them between the cables every six feet. Nailing floorboards on the two-by-fours finished the slickest suspension bridge you ever laid eyes on. Plenty strong to hold up three times the weight of our loaded pack mules.

He and I went exploring across his bridge the next day, and we came on the old wagon road just where the map showed it.

That put us in the clear on getting the stuff out of the country when the

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right time came. I wrote a letter to the owner, explaining the set-up and naming a date a month ahead for him to have a boat waiting off the coast of Sinaloa to take us and the gold on board. We were beginning to get out more country rock than stuff with values, and I figured a month would clean it up pretty well.

You're right, mister. Charlie Morton deserves credit for fixing everything. If he hadn't backed me down about going in for supplies, we might not have known about the danger from *El Chico* and we'd have likely tried to go out northward.

And he got hold of the wagon road across the mountains when it looked impossible to cross that way — and the bridge across the canyon was his idea from beginning to end.

What's that? I'll say, Charlie was quite a boy. He had everything that it takes to get ahead in this world all tied up in a little bundle. Brains, education, nerve, and ambition. Lots of men have one or two. It's not often that you run onto a guy that's got everything.

That's not all by a long shot. You haven't heard the half of it. This has just been sort of laying the groundwork for Charlie's big moment. What I mentioned at first. When I handed him his big moment and he didn't muff it.

Give me another match for this old pipe of mine and I'll get on to the end. It won't take long. I'm getting right on to what you writing fellows would call the climax.

Like I say, the vein was pinching out. None of us was sorry. At the price gold was then, we'd taken a nice stake out of that hole. We were all ready to take what we had and get out of the country.

Charlie was on his next to the last trip to town for supplies when it happened. His next trip would have been to get the stuff we would need for our hike across the mountains.

We were used to him not getting back until Tuesday when he went in on Saturday, and we didn't look for him back till then.

But he didn't come back on Tuesday.

I was a little worried when it came dark and he wasn't back. Not too much worried. Charlie had pretty well showed he could take care of himself.

I sat up late in my tent, checking over what we had taken out and making a guess at what the final amount would add up to. It ran damned near a hundred thousand dollars and I felt pretty good, knowing there'd be a fat bonus for all of us.

I went to bed about midnight and Charlie still hadn't showed up.

I didn't go to sleep right away. Like I say, I was a little worried about Charlie. We were near the end of a long hard grind and I hated to think of all the things that might happen to spoil the setup for us.

El Chico was my biggest worry. If anything happened to give him the slightest idea of what we had in that trunk, I knew it'd be just too bad.

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I went to sleep wishing it was a week later and we were on our way out across the mountains.

I woke up an hour before daylight, sweating and tense under my blankets.

It's awful quiet in the mountains an hour before dawn.

The sound of shouting down the trail and of mules coming fast brought me out of bed. The others heard it, too, and came piling out of their tents to stare at Charlie coming hell-bent through the cold starlight.

I thought he was drunk at first.

He wasn't.

His face was white and his eyes were bloodshot. He looked like a man that hated his own guts when he tumbled off the saddle mule in front of us and stumbled into the circle of lantern light. His voice was tight and hard:

"You'll have to get out in a hurry. *El Chico's* on his way with twenty men. He'll be here by sunup."

I grabbed his arm while the other men crowded in. "What's *El Chico* coming *here* for?"

He sagged a minute and didn't look at me. I knew, all at once, what had happened. Judas must have looked like that when he pointed out Christ to the soldiers. But Charlie shook my hand off and straightened up.

"It's my fault. I was a fool to trust Lolita. I thought she was okay. And she sent word to *El Chico* about the gold."

He was just a kid all at once. Just a scared kid admitting a woman had made a fool out of him. But he didn't make any excuses. He had the stuff to stand up and admit the truth.

I liked that about him even when I could have killed him as he stood there. But there wasn't any time to waste bawling him out. If *El Chico* was riding the trail from Querzica, that trail was blocked. I thanked God for Charlie's bridge and the road over the mountains while I told the men to gather what stuff we could take, and took one of the mules down to see about getting the load of gold packed.

There was a lot of running around and confusion with the men getting dressed and ready to pull out. I lost track of Charlie, didn't see him again until he grabbed my arm just as the last mule was getting his diamond hitch.

In the cold light of morning, his face was gaunt and gray. He had aged ten years since he left camp for Querzica three days before.

There was a difference, too, from the scared kid that had come running to warn us about *El Chico*. Something had turned him into a man. Without thinking it over, I knew he'd never be a kid again.

His voice was thin and frazzled. "I've been thinking. I've got to *do* something."

I said: "Hold it. We'll all do everything we can."

"But it's up to me. Don't you see? It's all my fault. It's my job to fix it."

The other fellows were crowding in. We were ready to pull out.

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I pushed Charlie away and said: "It looks to me like it's up to God now. He's the only one that can help us. You might say a prayer."

"No." He had hold of my arm again. "I've got a plan. You've got to let me square myself."

Something in the way he said it made me stop to listen to him. I said: "Make it snappy. We can't waste any time."

"I've got it all fixed. I've been working at it while you fellows loaded." His words came so fast they tumbled over each other:

"I've got a charge of dynamite laid under the eyebolts at this end of the bridge. I'll stay on this side — wait till you're all safely across — then blow out the bolts clean so there isn't a trace left. You take a hacksaw across and cut the cables on the other side. The whole bridge will go to the bottom where the brush will hide it. You'll be out of sight beyond the next ridge when *El Chico* gets here. I'll say you've outslicked him — that you broke camp while I was in town and got away down the trail and out north toward the border. He'll ride after you — waste several days before he finds out he's been tricked. By that time, you'll all be safe on the coast."

He stopped, panting for breath. Nobody said anything, but I could see the other fellows nodding their heads. It made sense.

I asked: "What about you?"

He grinned and green showed in his eyes. "I don't matter. This wouldn't have happened if I hadn't shot off my mouth to Lolita. You fellows go on."

I said: "Nuts to that. We'll stick together. Cutting the cables on the other side is a good idea. They'll lose a day going back to where they can cross the canyon."

Charlie Morton shook his head. "A day won't help much. He'll see the bridge hanging from this side and know you've gone across the mountains. We've got to destroy every sign of the bridge — make him think you've gone north. I'm staying on this side."

He meant it, mister.

It was one of those times that a man doesn't forget. One of those times that makes you glad you are a man — if you know what I mean.

What? Sure, we went off and left Charlie there alone to cover us. Didn't I tell you I gave him his big chance? That's why I'm here today — after fifteen years.

He wanted to stay. It was his big moment. I would have been a heel to ruin it for him.

I shook hands with him and said, "Good luck."

The other fellows came up and shook hands with him. They'd all hated him since he came on the job, but you forget about hating a man at a time like that.

I took the lead mule and started for the cable bridge. It was light enough to see a cloud of dust moving along the trail from Querzica. We didn't have much time to get across and out of sight in the mountains.

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Charlie stayed behind. He'd buckled a six-shooter around his waist and there was a grim, hard look on his face.

I looked back when we were strung out on the swaying bridge. The cloud of dust was getting closer, and Charlie was standing up straight, facing it.

That's the man, mister, that'll be coming in here in a few minutes. You can hear them yelling outside, now. He must be coming. I'll just have time to finish. . . .

I waved to Charlie with a funny warm feeling inside of me.

He waved back to me. Then leaned over and there was an ungodly explosion as he blew the bolts loose from the rock at his end.

What? I'm telling it the way it happened, mister. I was still twenty feet from the far edge when it happened. The others were on the bridge behind me.

They just sort of dissolved as the bridge went down under us.

It was like that. I saw it happen without knowing what was happening. Like watching a moving picture and not feeling it has any meaning for you.

Just for a split second while my end hung steady. Like a kaleidoscope — men and mules whirling over downward.

Then I went with them.

I didn't know anything for hours. I was lodged in a thorn bush halfway down the far side of the canyon when I blinked my eyes open and saw sunlight.

One ankle and three ribs were broken — and I picked thorns out of myself for a month.

I finally got twisted around so I could see down below me. It was late afternoon and the red sun was slanting into the bottom of the canyon where the rest of the men and mules lay crumpled on the rocks.

They were all dead — and the mules were stripped clean of their packs.

Half a mile down the canyon, a pack train was moving along the bottom, going out of sight around a bend.

I didn't know what had happened. I didn't find out until I got to Querzica three days later.

Charlie Morton and the gold had vanished by that time.

El Chico? Well, sir. There wasn't any *El Chico*. Hadn't been any all the time — except in the stories Charlie brought to camp.

Don't you get it?

It wasn't easy for me to get it at first, either.

Charlie had planned the whole thing pat from the beginning. His yarns about *El Chico* blocking the way north so we'd have to go across the mountains west; getting the map of the old wagon road; building the cable bridge for us to get out on so he could murder us all at once.

Oh, it was pretty neat.

The cloud of dust we'd seen coming from Querzica was Lolita bringing some pack mules to carry off the loot.

Like I said, that's where Charlie

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got his start. And it was me that let him be heroic and stay behind to blow up the bridge under us.

Yeah, with a start like that it's no wonder Charlie's worked himself up to be Public Enemy Number One.

There they come, now. That's Charlie Morton between the two guards. They're taking him up the ladder to the scaffold.

Do you blame me for being here after waiting fifteen years for this? A couple of those hard-rock men lying at the bottom of a canyon in the Sierra Madres were pretty good friends of mine.

They're putting the knot under his ears, damn his black soul. I'm going to wave to *him* this time, and I hope he recognizes me and remembers that morning when he waved to me — fifteen years ago.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Elisabeth Sanxay Holding was born in Brooklyn, married an Englishman, has two daughters, is well known for her magazine fiction, has traveled extensively in the West Indies and South America, and is the author of* THE OLD BATTLE-AX, NET OF COBWEBS, THE INNOCENT MRS. DUFF, *and* THE BLANK WALL. *This sketchy information was supplied to your Editor by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's publisher — one sentence of bare, unilluminating facts. What of the woman herself? What makes her tick? Unfortunately, your Editor never met Miss Holding — so we have no first-hand impressions. But surely Lee Wright of Simon & Schuster (Miss Holding's publisher) can fill in the missing pieces . . . Lee Wright tells us that Elisabeth Sanxay Holding is the kind of person who has a tremendous respect for work — not only her own work but the work of others. To us this is another way of saying that she has a tremendous respect for integrity. Further, according to Lee Wright, Miss Holding has a refreshing and iconoclastic mind: she thinks things out for herself, and when she expresses her opinions, they are not second-hand, not out of other people's books or other people's heads — they are her own. All this adds up to one inevitable conclusion on our part: We'd like to meet the lady!*

PEOPLE DO FALL DOWNSTAIRS

by ELISABETH SANXAY HOLDING

CAPTAIN Martin Consadine, Commissioner of Police in the island of Puerto Azul, lay back in his swivel chair, his neat dark head resting against the back, his feet up on the desk. The venetian blinds were down, the electric fan was spinning gently, and he was perfectly quiet in the dimness. He was not asleep, though, or even drowsy in the heat of the tropic afternoon; he was simply taking it easy while he could.

He had been in Puerto Azul only a month, and he had not yet quite got the hang of the place. But that did not trouble him. He had been a policeman in Ceylon, in Demerara, in Trinidad, and elsewhere; he had almost forgotten Ireland, where he was born, London where he had been trained. Wherever he was sent, he would settle down, and would get on courteously and fairly with whatever people happened to be there; nothing was exotic to him any longer, nothing was strange.

There was a knock at the door, and Constable Merribell entered.

"Sah!"

"Yes, Constable?"

Merribell was invaluable to him, a portly colored man of calm and de-

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corous demeanor, with a colossal knowledge of the island and its inhabitants.

"Lady on the telephone, sah. Will not tell me what she want. Say she got to speak to 'the captain'."

"I'll take it," said Consadine, rising, tall, straight, a little gaunt; a handsome man in his own disciplined fashion.

He went into the anteroom and took the telephone.

"Commissioner Consadine speaking," he said.

"Commissioner, is it?" said a fervent voice. "God be praised I've a man like yourself to talk to, and not a monkey out of the zoo."

That voice, that accent, made him smile a little.

"What is it you want, madam?" he asked.

"There is bad trouble here," she said.

"Trouble where, madam?"

"It is Captain Jarvis's house, and there is trouble."

"What sort of trouble?"

"Once you're here," she said, "it'll be plain as daylight to a smart man like yourself, Commissioner. Will you come now, as soon as you can?"

"I'll have to have more information, madam," he said.

She was silent for a moment.

"If it was in New York, now," she said, coldly, "the police'd see for themselves what was wrong, and not be wasting time on the tillyphone."

"This is not New York, madam."

"And well do I know it!" she cried. "If it's information you're wanting, the Captain's brother is hurt, how bad I don't know. But there is *more to come.*"

"What is your name, madam?"

"The name," she said, "is Mrs. Gogarty, and I am the cook. Will you not come, Commissioner dear, and see for yourself?"

"I'll need more information—" said Consadine, but Mrs. Gogarty had hung up.

The sensible thing would be to send Merribell to look into this matter. Certainly Mrs. Gogarty had given no reason why the Commissioner should go in person. And yet he thought that he would go. Something in the woman's voice, and her words, stirred an old and long-forgotten emotion in him. He felt that Mrs. Gogarty was a fine woman, sensible too, and not easily flustered. He turned to Merribell.

"Do you know where a Captain Jarvis lives, Sergeant?"

"Oh, undoubtedly, sah! Captain Jarvis very well known in the island, sah, and highly esteemed. Live out on the South Shore now."

"What sort of captain? Army?"

"Oh, no, sah. Marchant Marine. Been coming down here for years on he ship. Third Mate, Second Mate, Chief, Captain. Then he ship torpedoed, and the faculty of hearing damage."

"Is he married?"

"Oh, no, sah. Single gentleman. But he brother and he brother wife here now from New York."

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"What about them?"

"Brother wife a very quiet lady, sah. Stay home all the time. Never see she."

"And the brother?"

"He drink, sah," said Merribell, gravely.

"Well, we'll drive out there," said Consadine.

Merribell squeezed in behind the wheel of the small car, and they drove through the town, past the cane fields and up a hill, to the shore road that ran along the cliffs. Nothing grew here but short, rank grass and here and there a tamarisk tree; in the old days of great estates no one had lived here, but now there was a settlement of five or six new houses, high above the road, without walls or fences, and looking very lonely in this empty world. Merribell stopped the car before the last of them, a white wooden house, narrow and ugly, already bleached and weather-beaten, and Consadine got out and started up the long flight of steps cut in the rock.

Everything was completely quiet in the blazing afternoon sun; the road behind him was empty; as he reached the top of the steps he could see the Caribbean stretching out to the horizon, blue and empty. And this disturbed him. *I shouldn't have come without more information*, he told himself.

He rang the bell, and the door was opened promptly by a nonchalant young fellow in dungarees.

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Gogarty," said Consadine.

The young man turned his head.

"Gogarty," he called. "You're wanted."

Then he came out, past Consadine down the steps of the veranda, and disappeared round the corner of the house. Consadine waited a moment and then, because he did not like Merribell to see his Commissioner standing ignored outside the house, he entered the hall.

It was a cramped, ungracious house. From the narrow hall rose a narrow and very steep stairway, and against the wall facing it stood a colossal hatrack that was almost like a crazy little house in itself, with a seat and tiers of shelves and wooden antlers and a round mirror.

A door opened upstairs, and a girl began to descend the stairs; a very pretty little blonde, slim and full-bosomed, in a sleeveless black-and-white striped dress with a halter tied in a saucy bow at the nape of her neck.

"Yes?" she asked, polite but unsmiling.

"I'd like to see Mrs. Gogarty, please," said Consadine.

She looked surprised, and why shouldn't she?

"It's — there's nothing wrong, is there?" she asked.

He was a man of authority, and he must now allow himself to feel abashed.

"I'm the Commissioner of Police, madam," he said. "We've been informed that there's been — some trouble here."

"Oh!" she said. "Well, yes. My husband fell down the stairs. But

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Doctor Buller has seen him . . ."

And there's no reason for *you* to be here.

"If you'll give me an account of the accident, madam. . . ?" said Consadine, stiff and aloof to cover his secret chagrin.

"I was in my room when I heard the fall," she said. "I came down, and Francis — that's Captain Jarvis, my brother-in-law — was already here. He called out the window to Hazen —"

"Who is Hazen, madam?"

"He's the handyman. He came in, and he and Francis — Captain Jarvis — carried my husband upstairs. He was unconscious."

She began to cry, very quietly, and that disturbed Consadine.

"Doctor Buller saw your husband?"

"Yes. He said to keep him very quiet, and he'd look in tomorrow morning."

So there it was. A drunk had fallen downstairs, and here was the Police Commissioner making a marvellous fool of himself.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," he said, "but I'd like a word with Mrs. Gogarty."

"I'll get her," said Mrs. Jarvis.

"Don't bother. If you'll tell me where I'm likely to find her. . . ?"

"I suppose she's in the kitchen," said the girl. "That's just down the hall."

"Thank you," he said, with formality, and went down the hall, opened a door, went through a pantry and into the kitchen, where he found the young fellow in dungarees washing his face at the sink.

"Where's Mrs. Gogarty?" asked Consadine.

"I wouldn't know," answered the other, drying his face and his sturdy neck on a roller towel.

Consadine did not like his tone. Above all, he did not like his own position, wandering around here, looking for this outrageous Mrs. Gogarty.

"I'm the Commissioner of Police here," he said. "I want your name, address, and occupation."

"The name," said the other, "is Hazen. Louis. Address is Toronto Villa. Occupation is licensed hack-driver."

"What are you doing here?"

"Working on the electric pump, and the car. I was in the Merchant Marine in the war, and I sailed with Captain Jarvis once. Now whenever he wants anything done, he sends for me."

"Were you in the house when the Captain's brother fell?"

"Nope. In the garage. The Captain yelled out the window to me, and I came. I helped him carry Bill upstairs."

"Was — William Jarvis conscious at that time?"

"Out like a light," said Hazen, cheerfully. "I thought he was dead."

"You're well acquainted with the family?"

"Me?" said Hazen, with a grin. "Why, I'm just a deckhand that shipped with the Captain. I couldn't

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be 'acquainted' with his family, any more than a dog could."

He spoke with an easy good-humor, very sure of himself; he looked squarely back at Consadine.

"I come here to do odd jobs," he said. "And five, six times I was sent out to find Bill Jarvis when he was missing. He blacks out, when he's drinking."

"I see," said Consadine, "Now I'd like you to get Mrs. Gogarty for me."

"*I* wouldn't know where she is," said Hazen.

"Find her," said Consadine.

"They wouldn't let me go running around the house."

"She lives here, I suppose?"

"And how!" said Hazen. "Her husband was the Captain's pet steward, and when he died, the Old Man sent for her. She thinks she owns him *and* the house."

"I see," said Consadine, again.

He was very much at a loss now, but he was absolutely determined to see this Mrs. Gogarty, and to get an explanation from her. *I'll send Merribell in to look for her*, he thought, and went out through the pantry.

As he came into the narrow hall again, someone was coming down the stairs, a big man, heavily built, strikingly handsome, with black hair, bold black brows, bold, steady gray eyes that looked pale in his deeply-tanned face. He came on leisurely, and stopping a few feet from Consadine, he took a small hearing-aid out of his pocket and adjusted it.

"Well, mister?" he asked.

This was almost too much for Consadine, but he stood his ground.

"I'm the Police Commissioner, sir. I'd like to speak to Mrs. Gogarty," he said.

"Now, what's *she* been up to?" asked the other, with a broad smile. "My name is Jarvis, mister, and I'm responsible for Mary Gogarty. What's she done? Been pulling somebody's hair?"

"Oh, no. Nothing. Routine," said Consadine. "If I can see her for a few moments, please. . . ."

"She's upstairs, sitting with my brother. Doctor said he might be comin' to his senses any minute, and we're standing by. It's Mary Gogarty's trick now. I'll get her for you."

"Suppose I go up?" Consadine suggested.

"If you like. This way, mister."

Jarvis led the way up the stairs, and opened the door of a bedroom, dim, with the venetian blinds down; the big double bed, covered with a mosquito net, was pulled out from the walls, for a better circulation of air. A woman sitting by the window rose at once, a sturdy little woman with thick black hair in a tight knot on the top of her head, a fine color in her cheeks, fiery blue eyes.

"Well, here she is," said Jarvis. "Mary Gogarty, here's the police after you."

He spoke loudly, probably more loudly than he knew, and Mrs. Gogarty put a finger to her lips.

"You're right," said Jarvis, in a

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whisper. "Step out into the hall, Mrs. Gogarty, and find out what's going to happen to you. I'll stay here till you come back."

"I'll just take a look at the patient," said Consadine.

"No," said Jarvis. "Doctor said not to disturb him."

"I shan't disturb him, sir," said Consadine. "I'm used to these cases."

He went over to the bed and drew aside the mosquito net. A man was lying there, tall and straight, in white shirt and trousers, a neat white bandage round his head. He had once been a handsome man, but he had grown haggard and sick. And he had a look Consadine had seen often enough before. He raised the man's wrist.

"Here, mister!" said Jarvis behind him. "Better not do that."

Consadine bent and laid his head against the man's chest. Jarvis pulled him by the shoulder and he straightened up and faced him.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I'm very sorry — but this man is dead."

Jarvis fell back into a chair so heavily that it creaked; he looked up at Consadine with blank eyes.

"I killed him, mister," he said.

"You did not!" said Mrs. Gogarty. "Don't be listening to him, Mr. Commissioner. He —"

"I knocked him down the stairs," said Jarvis. "I killed him. You can take me along with you, mister."

Consadine took the key out of the door.

"Both of you step out of the room, please," he said.

Jarvis did not move. He had put the hearing-aid back into his pocket and sat slumped in his chair, looking at the man on the bed. Consadine touched him on the shoulder.

"I did it," said Jarvis. "I killed him."

"Step out of the room, please," said Consadine, but still Jarvis did not move.

Mrs. Gogarty went to his side.

"Captain, dear, come along now!" she said, coaxingly, and he rose.

"Like Cain. . ." he said.

Mrs. Gogarty took his hand and led him out of the room, to a room along the hall. He went in there, stumbling a little, and closed the door after him. Consadine locked the door of the room where the dead man lay.

"Commissioner, dear, I'll tell you the whole truth," said Mrs. Gogarty, "the way it happened."

"Later," said Consadine. "Show me where the telephone is."

She led him downstairs to a sitting-room, heavily furnished, where a telephone stood on a marble-topped table. She gave him Doctor Buller's number, and stood beside him while he called it. Fortunately, the doctor was at home.

"Commissioner Consadine?" he said. "Yes? Yes? What can I do for *you*, sir?"

"I'm speaking from Captain Jarvis's house, doctor. You saw William Jarvis after his accident?"

"Yes. Yes. Bandaged him up, and left him to sleep it off."

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"Your patient is dead," said Consadine.

There was a moment's silence.

"That's — most unfortunate," said Buller. "*Most* unfortunate. It —" He rallied; his voice became louder, and with a note of resentment. "It's very difficult to diagnose those cases, particularly when they're complicated by alcoholism. All the symptoms were characteristic of a simple concussion."

"You didn't think there was any possibility of his dying?"

"That's absurd, sir!" shouted Buller. "No doctor would answer a question like that. There's always the possibility of unforeseen complications in a head injury."

"But you didn't expect him to die?"

"Certainly I did!" cried the doctor. "I mean to say, I was fully aware that complications might develop —"

"I'd like you to come over here as soon as you can," said Consadine, and went out to the car, where Merribell sat waiting in calm patience. He sent him to fetch Nicholson, the Police Surgeon, and turning back to the house, he found Mrs. Gogarty standing in the doorway.

"Now will you listen to me, Mr. Commissioner?" she asked, sternly.

"Yes," said Consadine, and went after her, down the hall and into the kitchen.

"Why did you ask me to come here, madam?" he asked.

"You were needed," said she.

"I'd like something more definite than that," he said. "At the time you telephoned to me, there was no occasion for alarm."

"I knew there was worse to come," said Mrs. Gogarty. "And wasn't I right, Commissioner?"

"You mean you thought William Jarvis's injury was more serious than the doctor suspected?"

She was silent for a moment, and he studied her face, with the high cheek bones, the long upper lip, the dark-blue eyes. A passionate, stubborn face, he thought.

"Commissioner dear," she said, "to tell you the truth of it, I wasn't clear in my mind when I tillyphoned. Only when I saw Mr. Bill lying there, white as death itself, I knew there was worse to come. And wasn't I right? Isn't he lying there dead this moment, murdered by the two of them?"

"What two?"

"Mrs. Bill and that Louis."

"What grounds have you for saying this?"

"I know it," said Mrs. Gogarty.

"How do you know it?"

"Commissioner dear," she said, earnestly. "Mr. Bill could never have been killed by that fall."

"Why not?"

"Because," she said, "he wouldn't have been *let* be killed. The Captain's the finest man ever drew breath, and God Himself wouldn't let him kill his own brother."

"Accidents can happen to anyone," said Consadine.

"Commissioner, sir, it was the two of them did it, plotting together."

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"Have you any evidence that Mrs. Jarvis and Hazen were engaged in any sort of conspiracy?"

"I have."

"Do you wish to make a statement, madam?"

"And what else am I doing?"

"Do you wish to make a statement, to be taken down in writing and later to be signed by you?"

"I will sign anything at all," said Mrs. Gogarty. "All I want in the world is to see the poor innocent Captain easy in his heart, and that murdering pair —"

"You must be careful in making accusations of that nature, Mrs. Gogarty. Have you any evidence —?"

"I've seen the looks they give each other."

"That's not evidence," said Consadine.

"It is good enough for me," said Mrs. Gogarty.

"Have you anything definite to tell me? Any *facts*?"

"Holy Mother of God!" cried Mrs. Gogarty. "Isn't it fact enough for you that Mr. Bill's lying there murdered?"

"Madam," said Consadine, "there's no evidence whatever of murder. Captain Jarvis has stated that he pushed his brother downstairs in the course of a quarrel. He and Hazen carried William Jarvis upstairs —"

"Herself wint up, too," said Mrs. Gogarty.

"Mrs. Gogarty, when I arrived, you were in the room with William Jarvis. Who was there before you?"

"It was the Captain himself."

"Have you any reason to believe that he left that room for any length of time?"

"I have."

"Did you *see* Captain Jarvis leave the room?"

"I did not."

"Then how do you know that he left it?" Consadine asked, marvelling at his own patience.

"Because the two of them couldn't have murdered Mr. Bill unless the Captain was out of it," said she. "I tell you it wouldn't be *let* happen. The Captain wouldn't be *let* kill his own brother."

"Mrs. Gogarty," said Consadine, "do you realize how your accusation would sound in a court of law?"

"I do!" said she. "Put me before a jury of Christian beings, and they'd believe me."

"It's not a question of 'believing' you, Mrs. Gogarty. You haven't given me any evidence, not one single fact pointing to collaboration between Mrs. Jarvis and Hazen."

" 'Collaboration,' is it?" said she, with irony. "That's a word new to me. But if you mean were they carrying on, they were that."

"Did you ever see them alone together? Ever hear them arrange a meeting? See them exchange notes, anything of that sort?"

"Never," she said. "And I didn't need to. The two of them were carrying on, and they wanted to get Mr. Bill out of the way, God rest him. He was not good at all to a woman, the

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way he was drunk all the time, and roaring up and down the island. But that didn't give the two of them the right to murder him, and let the poor innocent Captain take the sin on himself, and him so generous and good to her —"

"Captain Jarvis is — fond of his sister-in-law?" Consadine asked, very cautiously.

"I know what's in your mind," said Mrs. Gogarty, "as well as if you'd spoke the words. You are wrong. Mrs. Bill's got a way with her, a tweedly way would please many a man." She looked at Consadine. "The Captain, God help him, thinks she's a saint on earth, and that's the whole of it. It would never come into his head at all that his brother's wife would be carrying on with that Louis. But Mr. Bill thought of it, many a time."

"How do you know that, Mrs. Gogarty?"

"By the way he'd be looking at the two of them."

"Mrs. Gogarty," said Consadine, "You haven't given me one single fact to support your theory —"

" 'Theory'!" she cried. "It's the truth I've told you, and you've a right to take the two of them off to jail, before there's more harm done."

"There's no case against them, Mrs. Gogarty."

"And you'll take himself off to the jail?"

"I'm obliged to charge him with manslaughter, Mrs. Gogarty," said Consadine, rising. "But he'll be admitted to bail."

She rose too.

"I've told you the truth of it," she said, "and if you will not believe it, so much the worse for all of us."

He went out of the kitchen, annoyed with himself for the stir of uneasiness her words and her tone had caused in him. *She's an utterly unreasonable woman*, he thought.

He felt it his duty to break the news to young Mrs. Jarvis, but he was much relieved when Doctor Buller arrived, before he had found her. The doctor was in a belligerent mood; a dapper little gray-haired man with a self-important air. He was still more affronted by the arrival of young Nicholson, the Police Surgeon; he went upstairs with him, in cold silence.

Consadine waited in the lower hall, and presently they came down again.

"At the time that I examined the patient," said Buller, "the symptoms were those of simple concussion. Complicated, of course, by his condition of alcoholic intoxication."

"I see," said Consadine. "Are you both agreed about the cause of death?"

"Depressed fracture of the skull," said Nicholson.

"Caused by what?"

"By what?" cried Buller. "Why, the man fell all the way down a steep flight of stairs, and hit his head against that — that thing there."

"Then you're ready to state that the fall could have been the cause of the fracture?"

" 'Could have been?' " said Buller,

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more and more outraged. "It *was*. There's no question at all about it."

"There's no possibility that he could have got his head injury before or after his fall?"

"Certainly not!" said Buller.

"Well . . ." said the serious young Nicholson, in his amiable manner, "I think we'll have to admit that the injury *might* have been done by some instrument."

"My good sir!" cried Buller. "You have the evidence of everyone in this household that William Jarvis fell down these stairs. You can see for yourself how narrow this hall is. It would be almost impossible for anyone — especially a tall man — not to strike his head on that — thing. That's quite good enough for me. I don't need any fantastic 'instruments' to satisfy me as to the cause of death in this case."

And it's good enough for me, too, Consadine thought. *Mrs. Gogarty told me nothing of any value whatever. Utterly unreasonable woman. Her whole story's an invention.*

Doctor Buller offered to break the news to Mrs. Jarvis.

"I'll take the poor girl home with me," he said. "My wife will be glad to look after her."

This seemed to Consadine a very good idea, and he went himself to the Captain's room. He knocked, waited, knocked again, and getting no answer, entered. The big man was standing by the window; he did not turn until Consadine touched him on the shoulder.

"All right," he said. "I'm ready, mister."

"I'd like an account of the accident, Captain," said Consadine, but Jarvis did not answer.

"He cannot hear you at all," said Mrs. Gogarty, from the hall behind him, "when he's not using the contraption."

"Ask him to use it," said Consadine. "I want a statement from him."

"Captain," said Mrs. Gogarty, speaking close to his ear, and very clearly. "Captain, dear, the Commissioner wants to speak to you. Will you put on the contraption, he asks?"

"No," said Jarvis. "I quarreled with my brother and I killed him. I'm not going to discuss the quarrel, now, or any other time. It's nobody's damn business. I killed my brother. For God's sake, isn't that enough?"

He has the look of a bull at the end of a fight, Consadine thought, *so big, so strong, so tormented.*

"Cain . . ." the Captain said. "Like Cain."

Consadine had a solitary and formal dinner in his bungalow; then he went out, to walk up and down the garden path while he smoked a cigar. And here he was a trespasser, in a strange and secret world. There was no breeze tonight, only a smothering blackness, perfumed with unknown flowers; things chirped and rattled in the grass, things moved with a rustle in the branches of the trees, things scuttled across the path; some night-

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bird made a strange gurgling sound.

He had thought he was used to all this, used to anything. But tonight, a man without a home, he was homesick, and it was Mrs. Gogarty who had done this. He felt very angry at that stubborn, utterly unreasonable woman.

He thought of the pretty little blonde, but only for a moment. She was better off without her sodden husband. Captain Jarvis was the tragic, the epic figure. There had been a score of people ready to go bail for him; he had had any number of invitations, of offers to accompany him, but he had gone home alone. There would be no legal punishment for him, Consadine was sure of that, but for the rest of his days he would be remembering what he had done. It happened so often, it happened so easily. One moment of anger, one blow of a fist could crash through the whole structure of a life.

Like Cain, he had said. But Cain had killed his brother deliberately, because of his bitter envy. And Jarvis? Had Jarvis envied his brother, perhaps? Envied him his wife? Envied him, hated him, because he was not deaf? Those things could be in a man's heart, and the man not know it. They could be behind a blow, giving it a dreadful force.

Well, I don't know, Consadine thought with a sigh. *Maybe a breeze would spring up with the moon. A fresh, sweet breeze coming over the sea . . .*

He went to bed, under his mosquito net, and after a while he fell asleep.

The telephone waked him, and he got up in haste to answer it.

"Commissioner, sir, will you come quick?" said Mrs. Gogarty's voice, with a curious ring in it. "For there has been another accident."

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Let you see for yourself," said she. "There'll be nothing disturbed at all till you come."

"Somebody hurt? I want full information —"

"Let you come and get it," she said, and hung up.

He was very angry at Mrs. Gogarty. For a moment he thought of calling her back and demanding a complete explanation. Only he knew he would not get it. *You can't do a damn thing with that woman,* he thought, *I won't go.*

I won't go, he thought, while he dressed. He called Merribell and told him to bring along the Police Surgeon; he went out on the screened veranda to wait for them.

"What's happened?" the young doctor asked.

"Accident," Consadine said, with unusual curtness.

"What sort of accident?"

"I don't know," said Consadine.

"Who's hurt?"

"I don't know."

The doctor was silent then, and Consadine made up things for him to be thinking. Consadine's not fit for this job. Hopeless! Getting me out of bed at one o'clock in the morning, to go to an accident, and he hasn't had the wit to get the most elementary

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information. Must have lost his head completely.

They passed the Botanical Garden. It was like a dense black jungle, and there was a bird in it that sounded like an owl choking to death while the whistling frogs piped away, jeering. There was a light in Jarvis's house, and as the car drove up, Mrs. Gogarty opened the door.

She was wearing a white cotton dress with short sleeves that stood out like wings. There was a fine color in her cheeks; her black hair was very neat, her blue eyes were alight. She looked handsome, and somehow dangerous.

"Come in, the lot of you," she said, politely, and stood aside.

Louis Hazen was lying on the floor at the foot of the stairs, with blood running down from one temple and soaking into the shoulder of his white shirt. His eyes were half-open; his face was gray with a mortal weariness; his breath came in a faint moan.

"The man's bleeding to death!" said the young doctor, on his knees beside him. "Send for the ambulance!"

Constable Merribell stepped forward, and Consadine turned to Mrs. Gogarty.

"How did this happen?" he asked sternly.

"He fell down the stairs," said Mrs. Gogarty, in a ringing voice. "And *now* will you believe me? Isn't it the judgment of God?"

He looked at her with a narrow, hostile glance.

"I want to talk to you," he said. "In here."

He gestured toward the sitting-room, but she ignored that.

"This way, sir," she said, and started along the hall. He restrained himself from catching her by the sleeve and pulling her back; he followed her into the kitchen.

"Now I want a complete and sensible account of what's happened," he said.

"Yes, sir," she said, with a docility that did not at all reassure him. "I'll tell you the whole truth of it. I was feeling that low in my mind, I went down the street to ask the colored woman that works for the Porters would she come and keep me company a while. She is a good woman, only she is superstitious, the way they are here. Ah, well, they're not to be blamed, for they haven't had the education we have. She came back with me, but she wouldn't go into the house at all, for some notion she had about Mr. Bill. So I brought two chairs out on the little back porch, and there we sat, with thim insects. I can't stand them!" she cried. "Heathenish things, flapping in your face, and some of them like a puff of dust in your nose —"

"Get on with your story, please," said Consadine. He didn't need to be told about those insects.

"I will, sir. We were sitting out there, the two of us, with thim insects, when we heard him come falling down the stairs, bumping and banging, like a sack of coal. In I went to see what

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was wrong, and Rose, she came along too, forgetting her notions. He was lying there, and he was unconscious. Rose ran off, scared out of her wits entirely. I tillyphoned to yourself and I waited, and after a bit he came to. Give me some whiskey, he said, and then, give me some water, he said. But I wouldn't disturb anything at all."

"You wouldn't give him water when he asked?"

"I would not," said Mrs. Gogarty, with a virtuous air. "How would I know it wasn't the worst thing in the world for him? No, sir. I leave him lay. And now you'll be taking him off to the jail, will you not?"

"To jail? Why?"

"God help us, Commissioner, dear!" she cried. "Don't you see it *now*? I told you the two of them killed Mr. Bill, and you would not believe me. It was God Himself sent him falling down the stairs, so you'd *have* to believe it."

"Why should his falling down the stairs make me believe you?"

"And why did he ever go *up* the stairs?" she demanded. "What was he doing here in this house in the dead of night, if it wasn't carrying on with her? Indeed, he could never have got into the house at all, if she hadn't let him in, for I'd locked and bolted the front door, and Rose and myself were sitting there by the back door."

"You have a point there," said Consadine, slowly.

For if young Mrs. Jarvis had been "carrying on" with Hazen, her husband's death took on a different look.

"Where is Mrs. Jarvis?" he asked.

"She's shut up in her room," said Mrs. Gogarty. "And never a sound out of her, with all the noise he made, falling down the stairs. She is shut up in there, shaking and trembling, because she knows her sin is found out."

"I'll speak to her," said Consadine.

When he knocked at her door, she opened it after a moment. She wore a white dressing-gown, and she tried to look startled; she tried to look drowsy, rubbing her eyes.

"What's happened?" she asked.

Consadine told her.

Oh, no, she said. She had been sound asleep, and had heard nothing. Not a sound. Hazen? she asked with a look of amazement. What was he doing here? He must have come to talk to the Captain about something.

"I'll ask the Captain," said Consadine.

"No!" she said. "It would be cruel to disturb him now."

"I'm afraid I'll have to," said Consadine. "He must have let Hazen into the house."

A familiar excitement was rising in him, although his composed and quiet manner gave no hint of it. The little blonde did not look pretty to him now. She moistened her lips, and glanced at him, and glanced away.

"The front door must have been left open," she said. "It often is."

"Not this time," said Consadine. "So the Captain must have let him in." He paused. "Mustn't he?" He

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waited a moment. "I'll go and ask him."

"No! Please!" she said. "He's been so good to me . . . I haven't any money, or any place to go . . . And he's so — straight-laced. He'd never understand. He'd turn me out. I — I did let Louis in. But it wasn't anything wrong. I just wanted to speak to him about —" Her glance flickered over Consadine's face. "About the garden," she said. "*Please* don't tell Francis."

"No way out of it," said Consadine. "He's got to know about this other accident, and he'll have to know how Hazen got into the house."

"He won't have to. We can tell him that the door was left unlocked. Louis'll agree to that."

"Mrs. Gogarty won't."

"She's a devil!" cried the girl.

"Think so?" said Consadine. "I can't waste any more time, Mrs. Jarvis. I'll have to see the Captain now."

Then it happened. He had seen it happen before, and always to his advantage, as a policeman. Yet it was, he thought, the ugliest and sorriest thing there was to see. Lover against lover, friend against friend, brother against brother, the cornered and the frightened turned as she turned now.

"You can't think what my life has been like . . . My husband was drunk all the time. Francis was wonderful, but he didn't *understand* . . . I know I shouldn't have listened to Louis — but there wasn't anyone else. I was so lonely."

Consadine was not touched by any pity for her.

"You helped Hazen to kill your husband," he said. And he knew what her answer would be.

"I didn't! I didn't! I didn't even know he was thinking of such a thing — until it happened."

Love against lover. She was desperately anxious now to tell it all. Doctor Buller had said that Bill Jarvis would recover — and Bill was going to talk.

"That's what they quarreled about, Bill and Francis. Bill was trying to tell Francis — horrible things about me — and Louis. And Francis wouldn't listen. He hit Bill. I didn't know Louis was going to do — that."

Until she had seen Hazen take a spanner out of his pocket and shift the bandage, just a little, and strike a carefully-planned blow.

"I haven't any money or any place to go . . . Louis can't look after me — yet. But later Francis was going to help him start a garage for himself —"

"Get dressed, please, Mrs. Jarvis," said Consadine.

She began to cry, catching his sleeve. But that did not trouble him.

"Get dressed, please," he said. "We'll have to see the Attorney General."

He went out into the hall, closing her door behind him; he was going toward the Captain's room when he saw something that stopped him; he bent over turning his flashlight on the floor.

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The Captain did not answer his knock; he turned the knob and entered the room; he had to shake the sleeping man to rouse him. He had to fetch Mrs. Gogarty to persuade the Captain to use his hearing-aid.

Mrs. Gogarty began to cry.

"Captain darlin'!" she said. "You're as innocent as a babe unborn — and didn't I know it? I knew you wouldn't be *let* do a thing like that, the grand man you are."

He stood silent, sick and dazed by what he had heard.

"Captain darlin'!" said Mrs. Gogarty, tears running down her face. "Couldn't you take heart now, when that's not weighing on you any more? When it's not — like Cain?"

He patted her shoulder, and after a moment he managed a smile for her.

"You're a fine woman, Mary Gogarty," he said. "You're a good friend."

"Just a moment!" said Consadine, as Mrs. Gogarty was moving away.

He went out into the hall with her.

"Just a moment!" he said again, and pushed aside a queer little rug that lay at the head of the stairs. He turned on his flashlight, to show her a jagged hole in the carpet.

"Yes," she said. "That's why I put down the bit of a rug."

"That rug wasn't here when I first came upstairs," said Consadine.

"I put it down afterward, so you wouldn't see how poor-looking the carpet was."

"That hole wasn't in the carpet yesterday," said Consadine.

"Was it not?" she asked, with an air of interest. "It must be the mice got into it."

"That hole was *cut*, Mrs. Gogarty."

She looked back at him steadily.

"Terrible sharp teeth thim mice have," she said.

"Mrs. Gogarty," said Consadine, "that hole is extremely dangerous. Suppose the *Captain* had wanted to go downstairs tonight? He might very well have caught his foot in it, and pitched all the way down."

Mrs. Gogarty's blue eyes were still fixed steadily upon him.

"No," she said. "He wouldn't have been *let*."

ABOUT THE STORY: *There is an interesting paradox in the story you have just read — Elisabeth Sanxay Holding's "People Do Fall Downstairs." You do not see any paradox? Well, suppose we ask you a simple question: Who is the detective in Miss Holding's story?*

The obvious answer is, or if you prefer, the answer is obviously — Captain Martin Consadine, Commissioner of Police. He is the official investigator; he is the person in authority; and despite his initial hesitation, it is Captain Consadine who cracks the case by putting such psychological pressure on the victim's wife that in supposed self-protection she

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tells the truth, thus pinning the guilt on her lover.

And yet, is Captain Consadine the real *detective?*

No — he is only the "front man."

Now do you see the paradox?

Let's put it another way: Who is the chief character in Miss Holding's story?

Again, the answer seems obvious: since Captain Consadine appears to be the detective, and since the story is unquestionably a tale of pure detection, it should follow that Captain Consadine is the protagonist. But it is not true: any way you slice it, it is Mrs. Gogarty who emerges as the chief character.

Yes, it is Mary Gogarty, the Irish cook, who commands the stage. Didn't you know it instinctively the moment her fervent voice said, "Commissioner, is it?" Those three words were the tip-off. And when you learned that the omniscient and positive-minded Irish cook was a sturdy little woman with thick black hair in a tight knot on the top of her head, with a fine color in her cheeks, with fiery blue eyes, with a passionate stubborn face — such a loving description could only be meant for the true protagonist.

Yes, that utterly unreasonable little woman is the authentic detective. Oh, we grant you have good and sufficient reason to quarrel with her methods. *As a detective, cook Gogarty has nothing but a pishtosh shake of her head for such things as logic and clues and evidence — such mundane minutiæ are for Police Commissioners, not for the intuitional and dogmatic Gogartys of this world. Didn't she tell Captain Consadine at once that Jarvis had been murdered by Mrs. Bill and Louis? Was there ever the slightest doubt in her mind (heart)? And when the practical, plodding, proficient Captain, who had been a policeman in Ceylon, Demerara, and Trinidad, to say nothing of London, asked her on what grounds she accused the wife and lover, what did our infallible little Irish cook say? Why, she gave the Captain the most irrefutable, the most unanswerable, the most utterly feminine argument ever devised: she just* knew!

And when Captain Consadine proved himself slow on the uptake, filled with purely masculine doubts and misgivings, what did our wonderful Gogarty do about it? Did she pause and ponder, seek factual confirmation? Oh, no — not Gogarty, not our dynamic, decisive deus ex machina. She simply took matters in her own hands. . . .

What chance did our poor male-detective have? None at all, if you realize this fundamental truth: in the eternal battle of the sexes, even in affairs detectival, the male of the species just wouldn't have been let *to win. . . .*

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From time to time, when your Editor succumbs to an especially playful mood, we shall bring you a detective story and conceal the writer's name. It will be your task — an old game we once invented called "Challenge to the Reader" — to identify the author. Suppose you start on a tale aptly called "Smothered in Corpses" — an unrestrained satire of the detective-thriller in general and Sax Rohmer in particular (with strong overtones of J. S. Fletcher, William LeQueux, and even an occasional undertone of A. Conan Doyle). You are entitled to a few advance clues: first, this "sensational" burlesque is the work of a famous detective-story writer — so famous that a book of his short stories is, in your Editor's opinion, one of the Ten Best Of All Time. Second, this story was written at Maidencombe in 1912. Third, the story's original title has been retained. So now you should know the sex, rank, nationality, and period of the perpetrator.

It is only fair also to quote from the author's own preface to "Smothered in Corpses." Here are the delicious details: "The author of the following story deems it permissible to himself to explain that the work was projected, and, indeed, almost completed, as a 120,000 word serial of feuilleton scope, when a much-advertised competition for stories of not more than 4000 words in length came under his notice. Not to be deterred by the conditions, he at once set himself to the formidable task of reducing his manuscript to one-thirtieth of its original length. The result must, of course, be regarded purely on its merits, but in the writer's own opinion the process of compression has, if anything, keyed up the action to an even tenser pitch, without in any way detracting from the interest of the plot or circumscribing the wealth of incident."

Thus spake — WHO?

Read the story, make your guess, and then turn to page 72 for the correct answer.

SMOTHERED IN CORPSES

by ?

I: The End of the Beginning

Where had it come from?

I, John Beveledge Humdrum, general practitioner, of 395A, Hammersmith Road, Kensington, had come down to breakfast on that eventful July morning expecting nothing more exciting than the eggs and bacon with which my excellent man Perkins had regularly provided me on similar occasions for the past eleven years.

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Imagine my surprise, therefore, on throwing open the door of the bookcase that contained my sparse collection of medical works, in order to consult *Abernethy on Biscuits*, to be confronted by the doubled-up corpse of a young man of distinguished appearance, wearing a suit of evening clothes of the most expensive cut.

My thoughts flew back to the events of the previous evening in an attempt to unravel the mystery. Had anything remarkable happened? And then I remembered an incident, trivial enough in itself, which might supply a clue. At about eight o'clock I had received a professional summons, notable as being the first in my career. A heavily-veiled woman wearing a complete set of massive ermines had descended from a magnificently-appointed motor-car before my door. In response to her impassioned appeal, delivered with a marked Castilian accent, I had accompanied her to a miserable tenement dwelling in a sordid Limehouse slum. Here, after I had reluctantly given a pledge of secrecy and permitted myself to be blindfolded (even to this day the mingled aroma of Enigma Vanishing Cream and frying spaghetti vividly recalls the scene), I was taken to the bedside of my patient, a fair-haired boy of three or four. A villainous-looking Chinaman who was in attendance gave me to understand, partly by signs and partly in pidgin English, that the child had swallowed a bone button. Being unacquainted with the exact treatment of such a case I recommended his removal to the nearest hospital. As there was nothing more to detain me I left at once, overwhelmed by the passionate gratitude of my mysterious caller; but as I glanced back at the corner of the disreputable street, I saw a face charged with diabolical hatred watching me from the grimy window of the room I had just quitted. It was the visage of the aged Chinaman, who but a moment before had been bowing to me with true Oriental deference. As I looked, rather puzzled to account for his strange behavior, a terrible explosion shook the ground, the front of the house disappeared, and a singed pigtail fell at my feet.

Recalling all this I was on the point of ringing for Perkins in order to question him, when something caused me to hesitate.

It was well that I did so. The next moment the double doors of the French window that overlooked the bustling turmoil of Kensington's busiest thoroughfare were flung frantically open and there sprang into the room a young girl whose dazzling beauty was, if possible, heightened by the breathless excitement under which she was laboring.

"Dr. Humdrum," she exclaimed, throwing aside the luxuriant crimson opera cloak that hitherto concealed the supple perfection of her lithe form, "save me! Help me!" and a look of baffling terror swept across her mobile features.

"Certainly," I stammered, bewildered for the moment by this strange

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intrusion into the dull routine of my commonplace existence, "but first let me have your name and address for entering into my callers' book."

For reply she dragged from her finger a ring set with a cluster of diamonds that had once, as I was afterwards to learn, graced the crown of an Eastern potentate, and with impulsive generosity flung it into the coal-scuttle.

"Call me Erratica," she murmured, with a slightly different look of terror contorting her lovely features. (And here, for the sake of brevity, I would remark that during the first seven weeks of our strange friendship she either shook with terror or shivered with apprehension whenever she spoke to me or I to her.) "Seek to know no more. Only save me!"

I was at my wits' end. She had already, with a gesture of loathing, hurled out of the window the glass of sal volatile which I had poured out for her, and that exhausted the first-aid remedies with which I was familiar.

"Save you from what?"

"From my enemies. I saw them knocking at your door. That is why I came in by the window."

"Would it not have been more prudent —" I began.

"Hush!" she whispered, tapping her exquisitely-modelled musical comedy teeth with her shapely Italian forefinger. "They are at hand. Play your part well." Then, with unsuspected strength and a knowledge of the arrangements of my modest apartment that staggered me, she tore open the door of the bookcase, flung the corpse that it contained on to my dissecting table, and without a moment's hesitation took its place and pulled the door to after her.

"Open in the name of the law!"

Rather perturbed as to what the fair creature required me to do, I obeyed the summons and was relieved to see before me the burly form of Inspector Badger of the Detective Service, an officer with whom I was well acquainted.

"Rum case, that of the murdered prima-donna, Dr. Humdrum," he remarked affably. As he spoke he took a seat on the corner of the dissecting table and thus, luckily enough, overlooked its grim burden in the glance of keen professional scrutiny that he cast round the room. "I thought that I'd just look you up and see if you knew anything about it before I ordered any arrests."

"Murdered prima-donna!" I stammered. "I haven't even heard of it. Surely you don't suspect —?"

"Suspect you?" said the Inspector with a hearty laugh. "Why, no, sir; but as it happens a bone button, wrapped in a sheet of paper bearing one of your prescriptions, had been used to gag the poor creature with. That and the yard of pigtail tied round her neck are our only clues as yet."

At the mention of these details I could not repress a start, which would scarcely have escaped Badger's notice had he not been engaged in taking a wax impression of my boots.

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"Tell me all about it," I remarked, with all the nonchalance I could muster. "I have heard nothing. Who is she?"

"Señora Rosamunda de Barcelona, the celebrated Spanish singer," replied the Inspector. "She left Covent Garden at half-past eleven last night, alone and wearing a crimson opera-cloak."

"Surely that was rather late to be shopping," I interposed, with the happy inspiration of diverting his attention. "Would not the market then be closed?"

"I understand that there is a sort of play-house there, where a lot of these foreigners appear," he replied guardedly. "By the way now —"

Possibly the compromising garment lying on the floor between us would not have caught Badger's eye had I not endeavored to kick it beneath the table. However, the thing was done.

"Ah, my old M.D. gown of the University of Ploughhandled, Ga., U.S.A.," I explained, with a readiness that astonishes me to this day, as I followed the direction of his glance. "I use it as a dressing-gown."

"Very natty too," he remarked. "Well, at seven this morning the Señora was discovered propped up in the vestibule of the Hotel Majestic, stabbed in eleven places."

"And the opera cloak?" I felt impelled to ask.

"The opera cloak had disappeared."

I rose to indicate that the instalment was almost complete. The Inspector took the hint.

"I'll look you up later in the day if anything really baffling turns up," he promised as he walked towards the door. Suddenly he paused and faced the book case.

"What was that, sir? Didn't you hear a noise in the cupboard?"

"Search it by all means if you wish, Badger," I replied with the utmost sangfroid, "but it only contains my zinc ointment, ammoniated quinine — and — er — a little bundle of odds and ends. As for the noise — they have the chimney-sweep in next door."

"I shouldn't think of doubting your word, sir," said the Inspector. Then very coolly he locked the cupboard door without opening it and slipped the key into his pocket. "A mere formality, but just as well to be on the safe side," he observed.

When I returned to the room — I accompanied Badger to the outer door myself — I stood for a moment considering the new complication.

"Deuced awkward!" I muttered, walking towards the book case.

"That will be all right, sir," interposed the soft voice of Perkins behind me. "The key of my wardrobe fits all the locks in your sitting-room — except that of the tantalus, I should say," and he held out the indicated object for me to take. Under what circumstances my exemplary man had made the discovery I did not stop to investigate, but I have no doubt that he had conscientiously listened to every word of one if not of both conversations that morning.

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I did not lose a moment in unlocking the door of the bookcase and throwing it widely open to release my fair visitor.

But the many-clawed hand of improbability had by no means relaxed its grip on my shoulder.

The cupboard was empty!

In speechless bewilderment my gaze went round the room from one familiar object to another in a vain attempt to solve the mystery. There was only one possible place of concealment there. I snatched away the coverlet that hid the stark outline on the dissecting table.

Imagine my surprise to see before me the corpse of the elderly Italian anarchist who had offered me a throat pastille on the grandstand at Hurlingham a month ago!

II: In The Thick of It

In spite of the passionate insistence with which Sybil (as I had now grown to call her) had reiterated that I should think of her no more, there were very few hours of the day or night that she was absent from my thoughts.

The all-too-brief moment that I had held her in my arms when I rescued her from the burning dope den in Montmorency Square had settled my fate forever. The emotion that swept over me when I found that we had been decoyed together into the abandoned radium mine in Cornwall had, if anything, deepened the conviction; and when I discovered that it was she and no other who, at such tremendous risk to herself, had sent me the anonymous warning that saved me from being drugged and tattooed beyond recognition in the Bond Street beauty specialist's salon, I admitted that something stronger than myself was shaping our destinies.

The baffling enigma of Sybil's identity would alone have been sufficient to keep her continually in my mind, even if I had been disposed to forget. One morning, after I had vainly sought for a week, I discovered her. She was in charge of a novelty counter in the bargain basement of Harridge's stores, and so perfectly in harmony with her surroundings that it seemed impossible to suspect her of playing a part. Yet the same evening I caught her demure look of recognition across the table of a Cabinet Minister at a dinner given in honor of a popular Ambassador. And had not Slavonski, on the memorable occasion of the Incog. Club raid, referred to her as "our trusty associate Mademoiselle Zero"? but, on the other hand, Inspector Badger had placed himself unreservedly under her guidance when she steered the river-police motor-launch in pursuit of the desperate "Hi-Hi!" gang. It was all very puzzling to me, plain John Humdrum, M.D., and when I now look back over that period I see that Sybil's friendship kept me very busy indeed.

Possibly something of the sort flashed across my mind one morning when I found on my breakfast table a note addressed in Sybil's characteristic hand. It was postmarked "Express

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Aerial Service. Tokio to Aberdeen," and franked "Urgent and Frantic" in violet ink. Stamps of the highest possible value were affixed wherever there was an inch of space in the dear girl's usual lavish manner. The enclosure, like all her business messages, was brief but decided.

"A great danger threatens," it ran. "Meet me at twelve to-night in the Mummy Room, British Museum. — Sybil."

Unfortunately it was not dated.

It was, therefore, in a rather doubtful frame of mind that I presented myself, shortly before midnight, at the formidable closed gates in Great Russell Street. A printed notice, read uncertainly by an adjacent street lamp, informed me that the galleries closed at six.

As I stood there in indecision an official emerged stealthily from the shadow of an angle in the wall, where he had evidently been awaiting me.

"That's all right, sir," was his welcome assurance, after he had flashed the light of an electric torch several times all over me. "The young lady has arranged everything."

Without further explanation he led the way across the broad moonlit forecourt and then through several lofty galleries. Pausing before a massive door he unlocked it, pushed me inside, and I heard the fastening close to again with a soft metallic click.

Never before had the mysterious gloom of that ghostly rendezvous of the long-forgotten dead seemed so shadow-laden.

Sybil — it was she — came towards me with a glad cry.

"You are here!" she exclaimed. "How splendid; but I never for a moment doubted it."

"But why *here?*" I ventured to inquire, in my obtuse blundering way. "Would not Moggridge's or the Azalea Court of the Frangipane have been more up-to-date?"

She gave me a reproachful glance.

"Surely by this time you know that I am the most hunted woman in Europe, my good man," she answered with a touch of aristocratic insouciance. "My footsteps are being dogged by anarchists, vendettaists, Bolsheviks, Czecho-Slovaks, Black Hands, Hidden Hands, Scotland Yard, the Northcliffe Press and several of the more ambitious special constables. This is literally the one spot in London where we are safe from observation."

"How wonderful you are!" was wrung from me. "But will you not tell me what it all means?"

In her usual cryptic fashion Sybil answered one question by another.

"Will you do something for me?"

"Can you doubt it?" I asked reproachfully.

"I don't," she replied. "But all so far is insignificant compared with this. It will demand the reticence of a Government official combined with the resourcefulness of a District Messenger boy. This packet must be delivered tonight to the Admiral of the Fleet, stationed at Plyhampton. The fate of the navy, the army and the air

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service are all bound up in its safe arrival."

"I am ready," I said simply.

"A yellow motor-car, with one headlight green and the other red, will be waiting for you at the corner of Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street," she proceeded rapidly. "You will recognise it by the driver wearing a crimson opera hat — that being the secret badge of the male members of our Society. Get in and the rest is easy."

Even as she spoke a sudden look of terror swept across her features.

I followed her agonized glance to the nearest mummy case. It was, the label stated, that of an Egyptian priest of Mut, named Amen-Phat, but the pair of steely eyes that I encountered looking out of the painted mask were those of the Hindoo waiter who had upset the discarded toothpicks into the poisoned dish of caviare at the Grand Duke's reception.

I turned to convey my suspicions to Sybil, but to my surprise she had disappeared, and when I looked again the gilt face of Amen-Phat had resumed its accustomed placid stare.

One thing was clear. In my hand I held the fateful packet directed to the Admiral of the Fleet, and my duty was to find the driver of the yellow car and to make a dash for the coast at all hazard.

As I strode towards the door I recalled the ominous sound of re-locking that had followed my entrance. Was I in a trap?

Whatever had taken place, however, the door was no longer locked. It yielded to the pressure of my hand, but only for a few inches. Something was holding it from the other side. I exerted my strength and in another moment I had made a sufficient opening to allow my passage. The nature of the obstruction was then revealed. At my feet lay the body of a man. A ray of green light fell upon his features, rendering them ghastly and distorted, but it needed no second glance to assure me that the corpse was that of the mysterious Ethiopian "minstrel" who had so inexplicably greeted me as "Uncle Sam" in the Empire promenade on boat-race night.

III: The Beginning of the End

Little more remains to be told.

I changed cars seventeen times between London and the coast. The loss of time was considerable, but it whiled away the monotony of the journey, and as a precaution, together with the badness of the road, it was effectual in throwing our pursuers off the track. Their overturned car was found the next morning in a lime quarry below the road near Dorsham. Beneath it was the body of the Greek curio-dealer with the Scotch accent who had sold me the cinque-cento dagger with the phial of cholera microbes concealed in the handle. By his side lay the form of the old-looking young gallery first-nighter. Even to this day my frontal bone carries the scar of his well-aimed opera-glasses, on that occasion when, in the stalls of the Hilaric during the Royal perform-

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ance, nothing but Sybil's presence of mind in flinging open her umbrella had saved me from a fatal blow. Both were crushed almost beyond recognition.

Dawn was within an hour of breaking when my seventeenth car — a taxi-cab of obsolete pattern — broke down in the quaint old High Street of Plyhampton. Leaving it to its fate I went on alone to make inquiries, and soon learned, to my delight, that the superdreadnought *Stalactite*, the flagship of the Admiral, was lying at that moment moored to the end of the pier. Truly fate, which had played us many sorry tricks in the past, was on our side that night.

Despite the earliness of the hour, the Admiral, Sir Slocombe Colqumondeley, received me at once in his stateroom, a magnificent apartment upholstered in green and gold. As his eyes rested on the superscription of the packet I handed him he could not repress a slight start, but before he had finished the reading of the message his face had grown strangely tense. For a few minutes he paced the salon in deep thought, then turning to an instrument he transmitted a series of commands in quick succession. I have since learned, though I little suspected it at the time, that the tenor of these orders was for every ship of the fleet to clear for action.

Shaking off his preoccupation Sir Slocombe turned to me with an engaging smile.

"So you are my daughter Sybil's young man, Dr. Humdrum?" he exclaimed, with bluff sailor-like heartiness. "Well, well; we must see what we can arrange after this business is over. How would Surgeon-Major of the Fleet suit you; eh, what?"

A few minutes later I was leaving the pier, more bewildered by the turn events had taken than I would care to admit, when a tall, dignified officer, with grey mutton-chop side-whiskers, approached me.

"Pardon me, but did you enter Plyhampton in a taxicab numbered XYZ999?" he inquired courteously.

"I did," I replied, referring to the details which I had taken the precaution to jot down on my cuff.

"Then it is my duty, as Warden of the Port, to put you in irons," and he beckoned to a master of marines.

"On what charge?" I demanded with some hauteur.

"The driver of the taxi has been found stabbed to death with his own speed lever," he explained gravely. "Inside the vehicle was the dead body of the notorious international spy known to the secret police as 'Mr. A.' He was disguised as an elderly Chinese seaman, and was wearing, beneath his tunic, a forged Order of the Crimson Hat of Siam."

"Is it possible?" I gasped.

"Well, frankly, it doesn't sound it," he admitted with unofficial candor; "but that isn't my affair."

"I am Dr. Humdrum," I said, producing my stethoscope, "and I live at 305A Hammersmith Road, Kensington. Surely —"

"That is quite satisfactory," he

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replied, throwing the handcuffs into a lee scupper that stood open. "Accept my apology. Hold an inquest on the bodies as soon as you conveniently can and you have my assurance that you will hear nothing further of this unpleasant business."

We are seated in the Piazzo d'Esperanto at Mentone. Sybil's head is nestling on my shoulder.

"Had we better not explain to them now, darling, exactly what it was all about?" I venture to suggest.

"No, dearest; I don't think we better had," replies Sybil, watching the play of the deep blue against the distant haze.

The Answer to Who Wrote
Smothered in Corpses

If you guessed wrong — in fact, if you were unable to guess at all! — do not be chagrined. This was a tough nut to crack. There was no well-known detective character whose parody of name or mannerisms could offer you a clue; there was no take-off of the author's own style, since the satirical emphasis was directed entirely at a type *of crime writing. Yes, the odds were overwhelmingly against you — which should make the final revelation all the more astonishing.*

"Smothered in Corpses" was written by no less a figure in our detective literature than the creator of Max Carrados, the first blind sleuth — yes, Ernest Bramah! Incredible, isn't it? Yet this story is to be found in the author's book, THE SPECIMEN CASE *(New York, George H. Doran, 1925).*

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This issue of EQMM is star-studded with "unknown" stories by well-known writers. Margery Allingham's "The Case of the Frenchman's Gloves" — Brett Halliday's "Big Shot" — Rufus King's "The Man Who Didn't Exist" — and now "Where There's a Will" by Agatha Christie. And again, to the best of our editorial records and recollection, this story (like the one by Margery Allingham) has never previously appeared in print in the United States. It was published, however, in England — under the title "Wireless" — and it proves once more how cleverly Agatha Christie can blend, with malice aforethought, the natural in crime with the supernatural in time . . .

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"Above all, avoid worry and excitement," said Dr. Meynell, in the comfortable fashion affected by doctors.

Mrs. Harter, as is often the case with people hearing these soothing but meaningless words, seemed more doubtful than relieved.

"There is a certain cardiac weakness," continued the doctor fluently, "but nothing to be alarmed about. I can assure you of that. All the same," he added, "it might be as well to have an elevator installed. Eh? What about it?"

Mrs. Harter looked worried.

Dr. Meynell, on the contrary, looked pleased with himself. The reason he liked attending rich patients rather than poor ones was that he could exercise his active imagination in prescribing for their ailments.

"Yes, an elevator," said Dr. Meynell, trying to think of something else even more dashing — and failing. "Then we shall avoid all undue exertion. Daily exercise on the level on a fine day, but avoid walking up hills. And above all, plenty of distraction for the mind. Don't dwell on your health."

To the old lady's nephew, Charles Ridgeway, the doctor was slightly more explicit.

"Do not misunderstand me," he said. "Your aunt may live for years, probably will. At the same time, shock or over-exertion might carry her off like that!" He snapped his fingers. "She must lead a very quiet life. No exertion. No fatigue. But, of course, she must not be allowed to brood. She must be kept cheerful and the mind well distracted."

"Distracted," said Charles Ridgeway thoughtfully.

Charles was a thoughtful young man. He was also a young man who believed in furthering his own inclinations whenever possible.

That evening he suggested the installation of a radio set.

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Mrs. Harter, already seriously upset at the thought of the elevator, was disturbed and unwilling. Charles was persuasive.

"I do not know that I care for these new-fangled things," said Mrs. Harter piteously. "The waves, you know — the electric waves. They might affect me."

Charles in a superior and kindly fashion pointed out the futility of this idea.

Mrs. Harter, whose knowledge of the subject was of the vaguest but who was tenacious of her own opinion, remained unconvinced.

"All that electricity," she murmured timorously. "You may say what you like, Charles, but some people *are* affected by electricity. I always have a terrible headache before a thunderstorm. I know that."

She nodded her head triumphantly.

Charles was a patient young man. He was also persistent.

"My dear Aunt Mary," he said, "let me make the thing clear to you."

He was something of an authority on the subject. He delivered quite a lecture on the theme; warming to his task, he spoke of bright-emitter tubes, of dull-emitter tubes, of high frequency and low frequency, of amplification and of condensers.

Mrs. Harter, submerged in a sea of words that she did not understand, surrendered.

"Of course, Charles," she murmured, "if you really think —"

"My dear Aunt Mary," said Charles enthusiastically. "It is the very thing for you, to keep you from moping and all that."

The elevator prescribed by Dr. Meynell was installed shortly afterwards and was very nearly the death of Mrs. Harter since, like many other old ladies, she had a rooted objection to strange men in the house. She suspected them one and all of having designs on her old silver.

After the elevator the radio set arrived. Mrs. Harter was left to contemplate the, to her, repellant object —a large ungainly-looking box, studded with knobs.

It took all Charles's enthusiasm to reconcile her to it, but Charles was in his element, turning knobs and discoursing eloquently.

Mrs. Harter sat in her high-backed chair, patient and polite, with a rooted conviction in her own mind that these new-fangled notions were neither more nor less than unmitigated nuisances.

"Listen, Aunt Mary, we are on to Berlin! Isn't that splendid? Can you hear the fellow?"

"I can't hear anything except a good deal of buzzing and clicking," said Mrs. Harter.

Charles continued to twirl knobs. "Brussels," he announced with enthusiasm.

"It is really?" said Mrs. Harter with no more than a trace of interest.

Charles again turned knobs and an unearthly howl echoed forth into the room.

"Now we seem to be on to the Dogs' Home," said Mrs. Harter, who

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was an old lady with a certain amount of spirit.

"Ha, ha!" said Charles, "you will have your joke, won't you, Aunt Mary? Very good that!"

Mrs. Harter could not help smiling at him. She was very fond of Charles. For some years a niece, Miriam Harter, had lived with her. She had intended to make the girl her heiress, but Miriam had not been a success. She was impatient and obviously bored by her aunt's society. She was always out, "gadding about" as Mrs. Harter called it. In the end she had entangled herself with a young man of whom her aunt thoroughly disapproved. Miriam had been returned to her mother with a curt note much as if she had been goods on approval. She had married the young man in question and Mrs. Harter usually sent her a handkerchief case or a table-centre at Christmas.

Having found nieces disappointing, Mrs. Harter turned her attention to nephews. Charles, from the first, had been an unqualified success. He was always pleasantly deferential to his aunt and listened with an appearance of intense interest to the reminiscences of her youth. In this he was a great contrast to Miriam who had been frankly bored and showed it. Charles was never bored; he was always good-tempered, always gay. He told his aunt many times a day that she was a perfectly marvelous old lady.

Highly satisfied with her new acquisition, Mrs. Harter had written to her lawyer with instructions as to the making of a new will. This was sent to her, duly approved by her, and signed.

And now even in the matter of the radio, Charles was soon proved to have won fresh laurels.

Mrs. Harter, at first antagonistic, became tolerant and finally fascinated. She enjoyed it very much better when Charles was out. The trouble with Charles was that he could not leave the thing alone. Mrs. Harter would be seated in her chair comfortably listening to a symphony concert or a lecture on Lucrezia Borgia or Pond Life, quite happy and at peace with the world. Not so Charles. The harmony would be shattered by discordant shrieks while he enthusiastically attempted to get foreign stations. But on those evenings when Charles was dining out with friends Mrs. Harter enjoyed the radio very much indeed. She would turn on two switches, sit in her high-backed chair and enjoy the program of the evening.

It was about three months after the radio had been installed that the first eerie happening occurred. Charles was absent at a bridge party.

The program for that evening was a ballad concert. A well-known soprano was singing *Annie Laurie*, and in the middle of *Annie Laurie* a strange thing happened. There was a sudden break, the music ceased for a moment, the buzzing, clicking noise continued, and then that too died away. There was silence, and then very faintly a low buzzing sound was heard.

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Mrs. Harter got the impression, why she did not know, that the machine was tuned into somewhere very far away, and then clearly and distinctly a voice spoke, a man's voice with a faint Irish accent.

"*Mary — can you hear me, Mary? It is Patrick speaking. . . . I am coming for you soon. You will be ready, won't you, Mary?*"

Then, almost immediately, the strains of *Annie Laurie* once more filled the room.

Mrs. Harter sat rigid in her chair, her hands clenched on each arm of it. Had she been dreaming? Patrick! Patrick's voice! Patrick's voice in this very room, speaking to her. No, it must be a dream, a hallucination perhaps. She must just have dropped off to sleep for a minute or two. A curious thing to have dreamed — that her dead husband's voice should speak to her over the ether. It frightened her just a little. What were the words he had said?

"*I am coming for you soon. You will be ready, won't you, Mary?*"

Was it, could it be a premonition? Cardiac weakness. Her heart. After all, she was getting on in years.

"It's a warning — that's what it is," said Mrs. Harter, rising slowly and painfully from her chair, and added characteristically: "All that money wasted on putting in an elevator!"

She said nothing of her experience to anyone, but for the next day or two she was thoughtful and a little preoccupied.

And then came the second occasion. Again she was alone in the room. The radio, which had been playing an orchestral selection, died away with the same suddenness as before. Again there was silence, the sense of distance, and finally Patrick's voice, not as it had been in life — but a voice rarefied, far away, with a strange unearthly quality.

"*Patrick speaking to you, Mary. I will be coming for you very soon now. . . .*"

Then click, buzz, and the orchestral selection was in full swing again.

Mrs. Harter glanced at the clock. No, she had not been asleep this time. Awake and in full possession of her faculties, she had heard Patrick's voice speaking. It was no hallucination, she was sure of that. In a confused way she tried to think over all that Charles had explained to her of the theory of ether waves.

Could it be that Patrick had *really* spoken to her? That his actual voice had been wafted through space? There were missing wave lengths or something of that kind. She remembered Charles speaking of "gaps in the scale." Perhaps the missing waves explained all the so-called psychological phenomena? No, there was nothing inherently impossible in the idea. Patrick had spoken to her. He had availed himself of modern science to prepare her for what must soon be coming.

Mrs. Harter rang the bell for her maid, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth was a tall gaunt woman

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of sixty. Beneath an unbending exterior she concealed a wealth of affection and tenderness for her mistress.

"Elizabeth," said Mrs. Harter when her faithful retainer had appeared, "you remember what I told you? The top left-hand drawer of my bureau. It is locked — the long key with the white label. Everything there is ready."

"Ready, ma'am?"

"For my burial," snorted Mrs. Harter. "You know perfectly well what I mean, Elizabeth. You helped me to put the things there yourself."

Elizabeth's face began to work strangely.

"Oh, ma'am," she wailed, "don't dwell on such things. I thought you was a sight better."

"We have all got to go sometime or another," said Mrs. Harter practically. "I am over my three score years and ten, Elizabeth. There, there, don't make a fool of yourself. If you must cry, go and cry somewhere else."

Elizabeth retired, still sniffing.

Mrs. Harter looked after her with a good deal of affection.

"Silly old fool, but faithful," she said, "very faithful. Let me see, was it a hundred pounds, or only fifty I left her? It ought to be a hundred."

The point worried the old lady and the next day she sat down and wrote to her lawyer asking if he would send her her will so that she might look it over. It was that same day that Charles startled her by something he said at lunch.

"By the way, Aunt Mary," he said, "who is that funny old josser up in the spare room? The picture over the mantelpiece, I mean. The old johnny with the beaver and side-whiskers?"

Mrs. Harter looked at him austerely.

"That is your Uncle Patrick as a young man," she said.

"Oh, I say, Aunt Mary, I am awfully sorry. I didn't mean to be rude."

Mrs. Harter accepted the apology with a dignified bend of the head.

Charles went on rather uncertainly: "I just wondered. You see —"

He stopped undecidedly and Mrs. Harter said sharply:

"Well? What were you going to say?"

"Nothing," said Charles hastily. "Nothing that makes sense, I mean."

For the moment the old lady said nothing more, but later that day, when they were alone together, she returned to the subject.

"I wish you would tell me, Charles, what it was that made you ask me about the picture of your uncle."

Charles looked embarrassed.

"I told you, Aunt Mary. It was nothing but a silly fancy of mine — quite absurd."

"Charles," said Mrs. Harter in her most autocratic voice, "I insist upon knowing."

"Well, my dear aunt, if you will have it, I fancied I saw him — the man in the picture, I mean — looking out of the end window when I was coming up the drive last night. Some

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effect of the light, I suppose. I wondered who on earth he could be, the face was so — early Victorian, if you know what I mean. And then Elizabeth said there was no one, no visitor or stranger in the house, and later in the evening I happened to drift into the spare room, and there was the picture over the mantelpiece. My man to the life! It is quite easily explained, really, I expect. Subconscious and all that. Must have noticed the picture before without realizing that I had noticed it, and then just fancied the face at the window."

"The end window?" said Mrs. Harter sharply.

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Harter.

But she was startled all the same. That room had been her husband's dressing-room.

That same evening, Charles again being absent, Mrs. Harter sat listening to the wireless with feverish impatience. If for the third time she heard the mysterious voice, it would prove to her finally and without a shadow of doubt that she was really in communication with some other world.

Although her heart beat faster, she was not surprised when the same break occurred, and after the usual interval of deathly silence the faint faraway Irish voice spoke once more.

"*Mary — you are prepared now. . . . On Friday I shall come for you. . . . Friday at half-past nine. . . . Do not be afraid — there will be no pain. . . . Be ready. . . .*"

Then, almost cutting short the last word, the music of the orchestra broke out again, clamorous and discordant.

Mrs. Harter sat very still for a minute or two. Her face had gone white and she looked blue and pinched round the lips.

Presently she got up and sat down at her writing-desk. In a somewhat shaky hand she wrote the following lines:

"*Tonight, at 9:15, I have distinctly heard the voice of my dead husband. He told me that he would come for me on Friday night at 9:30. If I should die on that day and at that hour I should like the facts made known so as to prove beyond question the possibility of communicating with the spirit world.* — MARY HARTER."

Mrs. Harter read over what she had written, enclosed it in an envelope, and addressed the envelope. Then she rang the bell which was promptly answered by Elizabeth. Mrs. Harter got up from her desk and gave the note she had just written to the old woman.

"Elizabeth," she said, "if I should die on Friday night I should like that note given to Dr. Meynell. No" — as Elizabeth appeared about to protest — "do not argue with me. You have often told me you believe in premonitions. I have a premonition now. There is one thing more. I have left you in my will £50. I should like you to have £100. If I am not able to

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go to the bank myself before I die, Mr. Charles will see to it."

As before, Mrs. Harter cut short Elizabeth's tearful protests. In pursuance of her determination the old lady spoke to her nephew on the subject the following morning.

"Remember, Charles, that if anything should happen to me, Elizabeth is to have an extra £50."

"You are very gloomy these days, Aunt Mary," said Charles cheerfully. "What is going to happen to you? According to Dr. Meynell, we shall be celebrating your hundredth birthday in twenty years or so!"

Mrs. Harter smiled affectionately at him but did not answer. After a minute or two she said:

"What are you doing on Friday evening, Charles?"

Charles looked a trifle surprised.

"As a matter of fact, the Ewings asked me to go in and play bridge, but if you would rather I stayed at home —"

"No," said Mrs. Harter with determination. "Certainly not. I mean it, Charles. On that night of all nights I should much rather be alone."

Charles looked at her curiously, but Mrs. Harter vouchsafed no further information. She was an old lady of courage and determination. She felt that she must go through with her strange experience single-handed.

Friday evening found the house very silent. Mrs. Harter sat as usual in her straight-backed chair drawn up to the fireplace. All her preparations were made. That morning she had been to the bank, had drawn out £50 in notes, and had handed them over to Elizabeth despite the latter's tearful protests. She had sorted and arranged all her personal belongings and had labeled one or two pieces of jewelry with the names of friends or relations. She had also written out a list of instructions for Charles. The Worcester tea service was to go to Cousin Emma, the Sevres jars to young William, and so on.

Now she looked at the long envelope she held in her hand and drew from it a folded document. This was her will sent to her by Mr. Hopkinson in accordance with her instructions. She had already read it carefully, but now she looked over it once more to refresh her memory. It was a short, concise document. A bequest of £50 to Elizabeth Marshall in consideration of faithful service; two bequests of £500 to a sister and a first cousin, and the remainder to her beloved nephew Charles Ridgeway.

Mrs. Harter nodded her head several times. Charles would be a very rich man when she was dead. Well, he had been a dear good boy to her. Always kind, always affectionate, and with a merry tongue which never failed to please her.

She looked at the clock. Three minutes to the half-hour. Well, she was ready. And she was calm — quite calm. Although she repeated these last words to herself several times, her heart beat strangely and unevenly. She hardly realized it herself, but she

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was strung up to a fine point of overwrought nerves.

Half-past nine. The wireless was switched on. What would she hear? A familiar voice announcing the weather forecast or that faraway voice belonging to a man who had died twenty-five years before?

But she heard neither. Instead there came a familiar sound, a sound she knew well but which tonight made her feel as though an icy hand were laid on her heart. A fumbling at the front door. . . .

It came again. And then a cold blast seemed to sweep through the room. Mrs. Harter had now no doubt what her sensations were. She was afraid. . . . She was more than afraid — she was terrified. . . .

And suddenly there came to her the thought: "*Twenty-five years is a long time. Patrick is a stranger to me now.*"

Terror! That was what was invading her.

A soft step outside the door — a soft halting footstep. Then the door swung silently open. . . .

Mrs. Harter staggered to her feet, swaying slightly from side to side, her eyes fixed on the open doorway. Something slipped from her fingers into the grate.

She gave a strangled cry which died in her throat. In the dim light of the doorway stood a familiar figure with chestnut beard and whiskers and an old-fashioned Victorian coat.

Patrick had come for her!

Her heart gave one terrified leap and stood still. She slipped to the ground in a crumpled heap.

There Elizabeth found her, an hour later.

Dr. Meynell was called at once and Charles Ridgeway was hastily summoned from his bridge party. But nothing could be done. Mrs. Harter was beyond human aid.

It was not until two days later that Elizabeth remembered the note given to her by her mistress. Dr. Meynell read it with great interest and showed it to Charles Ridgeway.

"A very curious coincidence," he said. "It seems clear that your aunt had been having hallucinations about her dead husband's voice. She must have strung herself up to such a point that the excitement was fatal, and when the time actually came she died of the shock."

"Auto-suggestion?" said Charles.

"Something of the sort. I will let you know the result of the autopsy as soon as possible, though I have no doubt of it myself. In the circumstances an autopsy is desirable, though purely as a matter of form."

Charles nodded comprehendingly.

On the preceding night, when the household was in bed, he had removed a certain wire which ran from the back of the radio cabinet to his bedroom on the floor above. Also, since the evening had been a chilly one, he had asked Elizabeth to light a fire in his room, and in that fire he had burned a chestnut beard and whiskers. Some Victorian clothing belong-

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ing to his late uncle he replaced in the camphor-scented chest in the attic.

As far as he could see, he was perfectly safe. His plan, the shadowy outline of which had first formed in his brain when Doctor Meynell had told him that his aunt might with due care live for many years, had succeeded admirably. A sudden shock, Dr. Meynell had said. Charles, that affectionate young man, beloved of old ladies, smiled to himself.

When the doctor had departed, Charles went about his duties mechanically. Certain funeral arrangements had to be finally settled. Relatives coming from a distance had to have trains looked out for them. In one or two cases they would have to stay the night. Charles went about it all efficiently and methodically, to the accompaniment of an undercurrent of his own thoughts.

A very good stroke of business! That was the burden of them. Nobody, least of all his dead aunt, had known in what perilous straits Charles stood. His activities, carefully concealed from the world, had landed him where the shadow of a prison loomed ahead.

Exposure and ruin had stared him in the face unless he could in a few short months raise a considerable sum of money. Well — that was all right now. Charles smiled to himself. Thanks to — yes, call it a practical joke — nothing criminal about *that* — he was saved. He was now a very rich man. He had no anxieties on the subject, for Mrs. Harter had never made any secret of her intentions.

Chiming in very appositely with these thoughts, Elizabeth put her head round the door and informed him that Mr. Hopkinson was here and would like to see him.

About time, too, Charles thought. Repressing a tendency to whistle, he composed his face to one of suitable gravity and went to the library. There he greeted the precise old gentleman who had been for over a quarter of a century the late Mrs. Harter's legal adviser.

The lawyer seated himself at Charles's invitation and with a dry little cough entered upon business matters.

"I did not quite understand your letter to me, Mr. Ridgeway. You seemed to be under the impression that the late Mrs. Harter's will was in our keeping?"

Charles stared at him.

"But surely — I've heard my aunt say as much."

"Oh! quite so, quite so. It *was* in our keeping."

"*Was?*"

"That is what I said. Mrs. Harter wrote to us, asking that it might be forwarded to her on Tuesday last."

An uneasy feeling crept over Charles. He felt a far-off premonition of unpleasantness.

"Doubtless it will come to light among her papers," continued the lawyer smoothly.

Charles said nothing. He was afraid to trust his tongue. He had already been through Mrs. Harter's papers

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pretty thoroughly, well enough to be quite certain that no will was among them. In a minute or two, when he had regained control of himself, he said so. His voice sounded unreal to himself, and he had a sensation as of cold water trickling down his back.

"Has anyone been through her personal effects?" asked the lawyer.

Charles replied that the maid, Elizabeth, had done so. At Mr. Hopkinson's suggestion Elizabeth was sent for. She came promptly, grim and upright, and answered the questions put to her.

She had been through all her mistress's clothes and personal belongings. She was quite sure that there had been no legal document such as a will among them. She knew what the will looked like — her poor mistress had had it in her hand only the morning of her death.

"You are sure of that?" asked the lawyer sharply.

"Yes, sir. She told me so. And she made me take fifty pounds in notes. The will was in a long blue envelope."

"Quite right," said Mr. Hopkinson.

"Now I come to think of it," continued Elizabeth, "that same blue envelope was lying on this table the morning after — but empty. I laid it on the desk."

"I remember seeing it there," said Charles.

He got up and went over to the desk. In a minute or two he turned round with an envelope in his hand which he handed to Mr. Hopkinson. The latter examined it and nodded his head.

"That is the envelope in which I despatched the will on Tuesday last."

Both men looked hard at Elizabeth.

"Is there anything more, sir?" she inquired respectfully.

"Not at present, thank you."

Elizabeth went towards the door.

"One minute," said the lawyer. "Was there a fire in the grate that evening?"

"Yes, sir, there was always a fire."

"Thank you, that will do."

Elizabeth went out. Charles leaned forward, resting a shaking hand on the table.

"What do you think? What are you driving at?"

Mr. Hopkinson shook his head.

"We must still hope the will may turn up. If it does not ——"

"Well, if it does not?"

"I am afraid there is only one conclusion possible. Your aunt sent for that will in order to destroy it. Not wishing Elizabeth to lose by that, she gave her the amount of her legacy in cash."

"But why?" cried Charles wildly. "Why?"

Mr. Hopkinson coughed. A dry cough.

"You have had no — er — disagreement with your aunt, Mr. Ridgeway?" he murmured.

Charles gasped.

"No, indeed," he cried warmly. "We were on the kindliest, most affectionate terms, right up to the end."

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"Ah!" said Mr. Hopkinson, not looking at him.

It came to Charles with a shock that the lawyer did not believe him. Who knew what this dry old stick might not have heard? Rumors of Charles's doings might have come round to him. What more natural than that he should suppose that these same rumors had come to Mrs. Harter, and that aunt and nephew should have had an altercation on the subject?

But it wasn't so! Charles knew one of the bitterest moments of his career. His lies had been believed. Now that he spoke the truth, belief was withheld. The irony of it!

Of course his aunt had never burned the will! Of course ——

His thoughts came to a sudden check. What was that picture rising before his eyes? An old lady with one hand clasped to her heart . . . *something slipping . . . a paper . . . falling on the red-hot embers. . . .*

Charles's face grew livid. He heard a hoarse voice — his own — asking:

"If that will's never found ——?"

"There is a former will of Mrs. Harter's still extant. Dated September, 1920. By it Mrs. Harter leaves everything to her niece, Miriam Harter, now Miriam Robinson."

What was the old fool saying? Miriam? Miriam with her nondescript husband, and her four whining brats. All his cleverness — for Miriam!

The telephone rang sharply at his elbow. He took up the receiver. It was the doctor's voice, hearty and kindly.

"That you, Ridgeway? Thought you'd like to know. The autopsy's just concluded. Cause of death as I surmised. But as a matter of fact the cardiac trouble was much more serious than I suspected when she was alive. With the utmost care she couldn't have lived longer than two months at the outside. Thought you'd like to know. Might console you more or less."

"Excuse me," said Charles, "would you mind saying that again?"

"She couldn't have lived longer than two months," said the doctor in a slightly louder tone. "All things work out for the best, you know, my dear fellow ——"

But Charles had slammed back the receiver on its hook. He was conscious of the lawyer's voice speaking from a long way off.

"Dear me, Mr. Ridgeway, are you ill?"

Damn them all! The smug-faced lawyer. That poisonous old ass Meynell. No hope in front of him — only the shadow of the prison wall. . . .

He felt that Somebody had been playing with him — playing with him like a cat with a mouse. Somebody must be laughing. . . .

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Rufus King contributes steadily to slick magazines and is one of our more popular detective-story writers — yet little is known about the man himself. His first Lieutenant Valcour book, MURDER BY THE CLOCK, *appeared in 1929; since that time The Crime Club has published no less than eighteen of his books, with the nineteenth scheduled to be out in November of this year. He lives in rural New York State, is a bachelor, and has trouble with the snow every winter — small gleanings indeed in these days of high-powered publicity agents. But we have discovered one interesting fact about Rufus King that few students of the genre have stumbled on before: in his sleuthing salad days he created an unusual detective character called Battling Beaucaire. This "candy kid from Park Avenue" enlivened the pages of "Flynn's" more than twenty years ago, and now we bring him back in all his sartorial splendor.*

In the first story of the series we learn that Reginald De Puyster, alias Battling Beaucaire, owned a fortune of twenty-odd million dollars, inherited from his father, old Warring De Puyster, the bearcat of Wall Street. Reginald is all that his name implies — in appearance. He is a dandy and a dilettante; in the parlance of his period he's "the berries"; his attire is always exquisite and his hands are lily white. But what a punch he carries! — in both fists. And therein lies the novelty of Rufus King's conception: the dilettante detective usually depends exclusively on his brains; Reginald De Puyster is a dilettante who possesses both brains and brawn, and literally cleans up his cases by squaring off and smashing a knockout left on his adversary's jaw. It's mighty hard to beat a combination of Einstein and Jack Dempsey . . .

THE MAN WHO DIDN'T EXIST

by RUFUS KING

THE private office of the O'Day Detective Agency on lower Broadway, New York City, was in a state commonly referred to as electric.

"You look so angry," said young De Puyster as he raised the sheer elegance of his much too perfect body from a chair and, crossing to a wall, straightened a framed photograph of a disillusioned looking wife-killer into more perfect alignment, "that one might almost presume you were vexed."

Dull choking noises tumbled about in O'Day's throat as with reddening eyes he sped sparks toward the young millionaire whose fanciful pleasure it was to act as an operative in such cases as seemed unsolvable. The noises

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made feeble efforts to become articulate in speech.

"Shall I ring for some water?" continued young De Puyster, returning to his chair.

"No," said O'Day softly. "The feelings now loose in my body, though painful, will doubtless be good for my soul."

"I don't suppose you brought me down here to philosophize."

"I did not," said O'Day. "It's to get the goods on a jewel thief named Houdini Jake, whose latest victim is Mrs. Scudder Hoyt, who is one of our clients and whose emerald, the Tashba, was gone from her safe this morning, as she well testified to, according to her maid, by her shrieks."

"I am interested," said De Puyster, getting up, "neither in emeralds nor in Mrs. Scudder Hoyt. She is a notoriously careless woman and the Tashba, which has nothing to commend it, by the way, but its size, will probably be found wherever she dropped it."

"You will not get out that door," said O'Day, pressing a button which controlled a locking device, "until you have listened to me."

"Most ingenious," murmured De Puyster, trying the handle of the door and again returning to his chair. "I gather from your actions that you are, to express it vernacularly, up a tree."

"You have put it much too elegantly, which doesn't surprise me in the least," said O'Day. "Three times did I in person hear that woman shriek, and each shriek was a nail in the coffin of her account, which is not of the sort that one buries lightly, but with many tears. The Tashba will either hang around her neck at the dinner she is giving this night to the latest visiting lion from England or a candle will burn opposite her name in my books."

"Then permit me to advise that you instantly dispatch your entire staff to search the floors of her house. It should be surprisingly simple even, if you will pardon me, for them. Mrs. Scudder Hoyt is not the woman to countenance cracks. You might specifically indicate behind the radiators."

"Yes, yes," said O'Day as he tried to prove to his own satisfaction that a pellet of paper, if coerced by sufficient pressure, could again be reduced to a pulp. "It is easy to see that you haven't heard a word that I've said. Do not, I beg of you, straighten anything else out for a minute or two, but lend me, as a famous Irishman once said, your ears."

"One of the O'Connors?"

"Either O'Connor or Boru. It is now twenty minutes past twelve, as you will be able to judge for yourself if you will turn your neck and look at that clock, which is perfectly straight, and which is hanging on the wall in back of your head. You will have at the most, say, six hours in which to work."

"I am glad that you have an apparently well-stocked library," said young De Puyster nodding toward

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the bookshelves that lined one wall.

"It is not reading you'll be," said O'Day, "but using your wits to find a man who doesn't exist."

"A man who doesn't exist?"

"I see you have settled yourself in your chair at last," said O'Day. "Let there be no budge out of you until I am through. When I say a man who doesn't exist, I mean a man who does and who doesn't."

"You can't," said young De Puyster.

"Hush," said O'Day. "He is like a trick in his actions, which is why the boys have given him the sobriquet of Houdini Jake. He is built like a Dutch windmill, so long are his arms and so squat is his body, not from the fat of loose living, but tough as a table d'hôte steak he is, to judge by the wallops he handed the Two Mitt Kid who is, as you do not know, the pride of the department and who has more false teeth and black eyes to his credit than the bandits of the West have notches in their guns."

"Then he has been seen."

"Twice — once by the Two Mitt Kid — and, her conscience alone knows how many times, by Mrs. Scudder Hoyt's maid, whose name is Clotilde Murphy, and who is old enough to know better, though dumb.

"She admits having entertained him in the servants' hall last night and was unable to escort him to the door when he said good-by, as the bell from her mistress's room rang violently at that delicate moment.

"When she came back, he was gone. So she thought. Where he hid himself is of no matter. But during the night, he opened the safe by the aid of a few tools and some loose morals and took his departure with the Tashba emerald to protect him from the cold."

"I fail to perceive why you insist, in the face of such evidence, that he does not exist."

"It would be better, perhaps, had I said that the man possessed an invisible cloak. By two people alone he has been seen, mind you — only *two*. High and low have the police been searching for him since he broke both the luck and the nose of the Two Mitt Kid, and not a stitch nor a hair has been found. Nor has he been idle. Five jobs has he pulled and this one last night was his sixth."

"He would leave cards?"

"He would not," said O'Day, making a mental note to instruct the office boy always to turn off the steam heat whenever an interview impended with De Puyster. "But his fingerprints are displayed with abandon at every job. It is for insult he leaves them."

"The case, it would seem, has its interesting moments."

"Which are passing all too quick," said O'Day with an anxious look at the clock and two anxious looks at his vis-à-vis. "You will have but the slenderest of clues to work on and one, at that, which has been abandoned by the regular department in a rage. It made monkeys out of them."

"Yes," said young De Puyster with polite credulity.

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"It was immediately after his fourth job," said O'Day, hopelessly fingering a sharp paper knife, "and the boys were not two minutes late on his trail. Into Cherry Street did he fly, nimble and quick as an impulsive cat, and the boys, when they turned the corner at Pike Slip, found him gone. 'Did you see where that running young man ran to?' they said, or words to that effect, to a future politician who was dabbling his toes in the gutter.

"It was either baby talk or Italian the lad answered them in, but one finger pointed to the doorway of a house with a disreputable front. They gave it a gallant crash and found it empty, but for one room. Nor could Houdini Jake have escaped, for all windows in the house were nailed tight and all doors, but the front, were barred on the inside, nor had there been time either for wits or for tricks."

"Two minutes is a lot of time at times."

"We'll call it one minute then, for it is only a figure of speech, and perhaps it was less than that. Now in this one room, which was not found empty, they came upon a pasty-faced young limb of Satan and a fat old woman huddled in her rags on a bed. 'Did you see that running young man who ran this way?' said Officer Muldoon, who had headed the chase, and had paused in the occupied room to investigate, while the rest of the boys were scouring the house.

"'Hush,' warned the young limb of Satan, 'my mother is ill. She has toothache.' 'Toothache, is it?' said Officer Muldoon, who can smell a rat as far as the next man. And nothing less than a flash of French intuition made him draw his gun and approach the old woman stretched out in her rags and groaning through the bandage wound round about her head.

"'In spite of the fox's cunning, his skin is often sold,' muttered Officer Muldoon in cold tones, as with his gunless hand he slipped the bandages from the old woman's head and gazed speculatively downward at her thin gray locks.

"'Tis a fine wig you have got you, mother,' said he, beginning to yank. But the wig would not come off in spite of his pulling, but insisted on remaining where it grew, and the screech the old beldam let loose was more than enough to arouse the dead.

"As you may well imagine, the matter did not stop there, and this day, if you wish it, you may go take a look at Muldoon as he pounds his beat by the fair Cemetery of the Evergreens in Brooklyn while his home, where he cannot get at it, is in the Bronx."

"It was a woman, and not Houdini Jake?"

"It was, and, barring the toothache, a lively one at that. Nor was she tongue-tied when she told her story to the sergeant. And a fine laughing stock did the newspapers make of Muldoon and the boys before they got through with the incident.

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"So that clue was closed, the department deciding the lad who had pointed his finger was either a liar or had not rightly understood what they had meant, him being but four and a foreigner at that. And Houdini Jake had made good his getaway again."

"Just why do you infer that that incident is a clue?"

"I'll tell you why," said O'Day. "It is ever a pleasure for me to beat the boys out when I can, and knowing the habits of them that live as do the pasty-faced buck and the old woman with the toothache, I sent one of my lads to their house while they were testifying in court and raising a fine pother over the hair-pulling intrusion and had him pocket the sole drinking glass in the place. And on it were fingerprints left by Houdini Jake."

"Then she was he after all, if one can accept the seeming incongruity?"

"She was not; for so convinced was Muldoon, and so struck by his flash of intuition imported from France, that he insisted upon the old woman being examined by a police matron before he was satisfied she was not a man."

"But Houdini Jake had been concealed in the place during the search?"

"He had, and I suspect the bed. By a casual question or two I discovered that due to the screeching and pother made when the old woman's hair was pulled, there was a general retirement in confusion and the boys never looked under the bed at all."

"Then might I ask," demanded young De Puyster stonily, "why you haven't sent somebody down there to look this morning? I trust that you don't entertain any delusion that you can persuade me?"

"It was the first thing I did," said O'Day, "and nothing did they find at all, besides the pasty-faced lad and the old woman whose toothache was worse than before. There was nothing to do but leave and post lookouts both front and back on the chance that Houdini Jake would either go in or come out. But not a soul has stirred, not even, if you recollect your Irish poets, a mouse."

"But didn't your men go all over the house?"

"They did not, being wary, as I had cautioned them, of the thinness of the ice. I've enough sorrow in my life without having the laugh turned on me, should I be accused of unwarrantable intrusion and a browbeating of old women with toothache.

"I do believe, however, that Houdini Jake is there, and that the Tashba emerald is there, too—probably playing the part of ache in the old woman's mouth, out of which you must get it before six more hours are up."

"Just why do you consider that this particular job could be accomplished by me?"

"Because they'll take you for the swell that you are. Nothing less than a social butterfly will you be, whose fancy it is to take side-swipes at studying social service for a hobby."

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"You have read of the rank injustice recently done by the police, their vicious intrusion within the sacred precincts of a home, and, realizing they only dared do it because the occupants were of the poorer classes, you have come down to right the wrong, to get the details, to present it, if necessary, as a test case in every court from the lowest up. Such will be your entrée. Your exit will be up to yourself."

"I will have no legal standing, of course."

"You will not," said O'Day. "And now that you have listened to my story with such eager willingness, you can either go to Cherry Street or go home, nor will I think the less of you if it's north you turn, for the picture of the battered face of the Two Mitt Kid is still painful to my mind's eye."

"The address?" said young De Puyster, smoothing pale chamois gloves upon his hands.

"The one on Cherry Street is this," said O'Day, shoving a slip of paper across the desk. "I take it that you know your own."

The lithe, powerful, pearl-colored motor, with its burnished silver trim and its spats of enameled leather, whose vigilant business it was to thwart any first-hand acquaintanceship between young De Puyster and the subway, swung around the corner of Pike Slip and gave haughty tongue to such junior residents of Cherry Street as were disposed, in goodly numbers — it being Saturday and no school — to be taking the air.

For a block or so its musical cry opened a threading lane for its progress, being constricted as to speed to the approximate furor of the old Hesitation Waltz. And neither beautiful nor dumb were the scatter of twigs that shouted and cluttered its path.

The sparse dotting of more elderly groups, composed of young gentlemen who had attained the insouciance and dignity of eighteen and thereabouts, proved more circumspect in their glances which, from veiled lids, implied an indifference that pithily found expression in words slipped from thin lips which did not move.

As the motor came to rest at the curb before the entrance to a house that presented an especially disreputable front, there was a significant flutter that passed as gently and as unseen as a mild breeze across the groups of young gentlemen of advanced age, and vaguely, as mists creeping shoreward from the sea, they drifted without motion toward the spot where the motor throbbed like a whispering sigh.

There was a distinct ovation from the junior element as young De Puyster presented his trim elegance for their gaze, and not a few falsetto shrieks from those more facetiously inclined. As to the elders, their eyebrows slipped skyward an eighth of an inch.

Young De Puyster mounted the ragged stoop with the distinguished indifference of an art that died with the passing of leaders of cotillions and entered the fetid murk that swam

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like a miasma within the dim hall.

"Well?" said a voice from the top of a flight of stairs; a gruff voice, a voice inelegant in the extreme, a voice that could only have issued from a mouth full of hardware.

"Quite, thank you," said young De Puyster and placed a foot upon the first creaky tread. A blast that would have brought joy to the heart of a modern theatrical producer blazed down on him. He continued his steady mounting of the musical stairs.

"I ses," went on the voice, lapsing in despair into the commonplaces of speech, "who the hell are you and what do youse want?"

"I am here on a mission," announced young De Puyster, his nose having reached a sufficient elevation for his eyes to take cognizance of the pasty-faced youth, whose attitude astride the top step spelled a dozen words other than "welcome."

"Sky-pilot?" demanded the host suspiciously, flashing an electric torch full in his visitor's face. "Oh," he muttered after visioning it. "Oh, la, la!"

"I represent," went on the lovely face serenely, "an organization whose purpose it is to right wrongs that have been done. Your case — the outrageous intrusion of the police within the sacred precincts of your home and the home of your ailing mother — came to our attention through the newspapers.

"We are anxious, if the facts warrant it, to prosecute the matter to the fullest extent. There is a heavy penalty, as you may or may not know, for unjustifiable arrest. We would naturally assume all expenses for the trial and simply want to get a first hand statement both from your mother and yourself as to just what occurred. If you will now be so kind as to conduct me to the sick bed?"

"Say, lissen here, Algernon —"

"Reginald."

"Reggy, youse trot right back to this here organization of yours and tell 'em what they can do with their offer." Several pithy suggestions hereupon followed that consigned the proffered aid to spots both devious and warm.

"I doubt whether your suggestions are practical," said young De Puyster, "but they shall be given our best attention. In the meanwhile, let us place the proposition before your mother. Her ideas, if not as colorful, may prove more serviceable than your own." He mounted a step further, so that but two intervened between them.

"Nix, Horace, nix! We're beating it for the sticks and got no time for nuts. Go 'way, while I'm still feeling good."

"Leaving — if my translation is correct — for the country? Then surely you'll permit me to take both your mother and yourself to the train? My car is at the door. We could go deeper into the matter that I came to see you about on the way to the station."

He will now be thinking, decided

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young De Puyster, of the net that the police might have drawn around this house, that the chances of his mother and himself getting out of the city with the Tashba emerald wrapped in her bandages will be best if he comes with me. He will come to the conclusion that a conference with her is in order.

"Stay put," muttered the pasty-faced youth, "until I come back."

During the five minutes that followed, young De Puyster took a notebook from his pocket and wrote upon one of its leaves a message to O'Day. He told O'Day that while *en route* to the station he would try to find out whether the Tashba emerald was truly in the old woman's bandages or not, and if it were, he would get it and then turn the precious pair over to the police.

In the meanwhile, he suggested that O'Day search the house immediately and locate the hiding place of Houdini Jake. He tore the leaf from the notebook and folded it into a size easily palmed. He returned the notebook to his pocket just as the youth, followed by a stout party in rusty blacks, who groaned, and whose face was bound round with a bandage, and whose bonnet could never have seen a worse day, rejoined him at the top of the stairs.

"Youse kin shoot your spiel, kid, on the way to the Pennsy," said the youth, motioning his guest to lump it down the stairs, "and tell your bimbo at the wheel to roll as if the box had been pulled three times."

Young De Puyster removed his hat and courteously offered an arm to his host's companion.

"Git!" came from the bandages, in no uncertain tones.

Young De Puyster gat. He managed, with unnoticeable expedition, to arrive at the street door six steps or so in advance of his party. He further managed, before the pasty-faced youth and his bonneted companion emerged into the light of the sun, to slip the much-folded note into the hand of a stevedore, against whom he brushed on his passage to the car.

"Your disguise, O'Day," he added in a swift whisper, "is as competent as that of an oyster once removed from its shell." A hot, wheezing sound from the stevedore's tight-pressed lips, assured him that his surmise as to O'Day's identity had been correct.

"The Pennsylvania Station, Maximilian," De Puyster said loudly, "and employ as much speed as will be consistent with safety and a faint margin of the law." Then he added in a rapid whisper: "Swerve sharply at some point on the course."

The rear seat, when De Puyster entered the tonneau, was already largely occupied by the pasty-faced youth and *madame*. De Puyster availed himself of the foot or two that separated them and slid efficiently into it as the motor gathered way. Not until they had reached Lafayette Street and Jones Alley did his tongue stop from depicting in fruitful terms the purposes, ideals and advantages of the great philanthropic

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organization to which he belonged.

Into *madame's* bandage-covered left ear he poured the bulk of his dissertation, while the profile he gazed at stared straight ahead in a stony silence. "And so," he was saying, as they reached Jones Alley, "one can clearly see that it would be to your advantage to place in my possession the full facts of that most unfortunate intrusion on the part of —"

There was a sharp swerve that all but crashed the motor against the curb. Before they had straightened themselves out after the shock, young De Puyster had noted two things: *madame's* hands had flown to her throat; *madame's* hands had then flown to her bonnet and straightened it. It had been knocked askew. "The Tashba emerald is held just below her chin by the bandage," he decided to himself, "and it would have been a pleasanter day for her had her bonnet been accoutered with strings."

O'Day, with a smartness that further belied his impromptu rôle of Stevedore Easy, read the note that had been slipped him by young De Puyster before that gentleman's machine had vanished to the extent of one block.

Swifter and chillier than the north wind were the instructions he gave to the handful of men who had drifted from the loungers and closed in about him in a tight circle, and like shot from the mouth of a gun did they plunge into the dark doorway of the house.

For five minutes they scoured it from cellar to roof, nor did they pause upon the niceness of their passage; beds were overturned, closets ransacked in a sweep and crates in the cellar smashed with a handy ax.

And a series of hails to his favorite saint rose like steam to O'Day's nervous lips when the search unearthed no Houdini Jake and the probable outcome of his energetic typhooning of a peaceful citizen's home stared, with its tongue out, into his face.

Nor was the annual washout produced by the Mississippi to be considered anything but the work of a rank amateur when compared with his opinion of his elegant aid who had put this noose around his swelling neck.

In two leaps and five jumps he made the street, where he automatically reassumed his rôle by giving, as he hastened toward the West Side subway, a brave imitation of any stevedore running away from any work.

He had, as the early Fourteenth Street dramatists put it, been foiled again. Into his favorite domicile, thin air, had Houdini Jake vanished once more. As for the Tashba emerald — a dozen unpleasant possibilities tormented his pattering steps, and his rage grew hot enough to make a rabbit spit at a dog.

Small use did he see in his present rush toward the station. Long before now, he felt sure, would the pasty-faced limb of Satan have stuck a gun

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against young De Puyster's elegant side, and himself and his old beldam of a mother, with her expensive toothache, have slipped from the car and be lost in the byways and subways of the refuge-giving city.

And bitter, indeed, would be the refined language dripped through the filter of her pressed lips with which Mrs. Scudder Hoyt would present the back of her hand and the sole of her foot to the O'Day Detective Agency *en masse* and to her lucrative account in the establishment in particular.

Nor were there any soothing anodynes to be gleaned from the rumpus he had just raised in the old woman's house; both the department and the press would put him on the spit for that, and he was far from ignorant of the pleasant saying, that if you get an Irishman on the spit you'll easily find two others to turn him.

But he ran just the same, as if fire had been placed on his skin, for the feeblest of chances remained that the precious pair might reserve their getaway until they should reach the crowds that drifted in surges about the train entrances of the station.

With luck, he believed, he could beat De Puyster's motor uptown and be at hand for the arrival. He determined to make an immediate arrest.

Slight as the evidence was that he held, there was nothing left him but to confront the old woman and her son with the fingerprints of Houdini Jake that had been found upon her tumbler, and seek to wring a confession from her as to the exact location of the patch of thin air where the wretch was concealed.

Though it seemed to last forever, the ride uptown to the Pennsylvania Station took but seven minutes and, like a woman in a store on bargain day, he forged ahead and took his stand in the center of the vast hall where its flights of stairs trickled with travelers from the streets.

He was shortly accosted by Nosey Phelan, one of the special men of the railroad, who with pointed politeness first passed the time of day and then floated a wonder as to what particular haul his esteemed colleague might be after at the moment and could he help.

"You can," said O'Day, "for there's two to be got — an old woman with toothache and her son."

"Are they being tailed?" asked Phelan.

"They are not," said O'Day, while his worried looks shifted to one after the other of the great flights of stairs. "They are being escorted by a young gentleman who, in this case, will be of no use at all, though in cases past, the fist that he packs was both a caution and a marvel to behold."

"And why," asked Phelan, who loved a tale as well as the next man and was never so happy as when spending his tour of duty in the listening to one, "will this packer of fists be of no use in this case?"

"It's his chivalry that will betray him," said O'Day, "for, as I told you, there's a woman in the case."

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"*Shershèz lay fem*," murmured Phelan wisely.

"I see you are up on your limericks, but in this affair there's no need of shershezing her, for she's already on the spot, and old at that. Not a hair of her gray hair would he touch, so polite and courteous is he to the opposite sex, regardless of their station, though the offense she were wanted for might well be murder."

"Do you tell me that, now?" said Phelan.

"I do."

"But the son, with his pants — Why is it your world-beater won't tackle him?"

"It's a question of size. Though he has to go hard to make it, the son is smaller in stature than my man, and not a finger will De Puyster put upon an adversary unless their weights are equal or the advantage is on the other side."

"It's both a strange name and a strange nut that your man possesses, O'Day, and how is it you came to employ him, or is it just full of fun and fustie that you are, like Mooney's goose?"

"Hist," said O'Day, "for there they come."

"'Tis as good as a circus," said Phelan.

And there were others who thought so, too, for not often were the patrons of the Pennsylvania Station treated to such a touching sight. The center of the animated tableau was composed of young De Puyster, blazing like an exotic jewel in a setting of rusty iron. On his left slinked, with an obvious mixture of bravado and furtiveness, the pasty-faced youth.

On his right, one mittened hand firmly entrenched in the crook of his arm, was *madame*, with her stoutness encompassed in blacks, her groanings, her face bound round with a bandage, her bonnet that for many years, from its appearance, or rather lack of it, must have done Spartan service against the rain and the sun and the varying winds.

"Sweet!" murmured a nice young thing from the Oranges to her companion in shopping as they stopped dead in their tracks to admire the strange trio descending the stairs.

"And where did she get that hat," the companion wanted to know, "outside of the American wing of the museum?"

Nor were the brace of fledglings from the Oranges the only ones who stopped to observe. More and more of the hurrying travelers slowed up, looked, and came to a halt.

"I wonder where the camera is?" asked an up-to-the-minute commuter from Bergen. "They're getting pretty clever in concealing them while they shoot their scenes nowadays."

"This is no movie, Esmund," said his wife, who saw in the situation an improving example and decided to use it, "but an unusual act of courtesy, especially for these days when it's almost extinct. I think it's just too sweet for that nice young man — any one can tell at a glance that he's miles above her in wealth and station

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— to treat that poor old suffering woman as if she was a duchess."

"She looks like a duchess at that," said her husband, who was wiser than she thought.

"Nonsense, Esmund! If anything, she's an old family retainer and he's sending her to the country for her health."

"What's wrong with her health?" demanded the Bergenite. "She's bursting with it now."

"Don't be vulgar, Esmund — and isn't it disgraceful the way this crowd is collecting to watch them; there must be over a hundred people. You can see how embarrassed he is at all the staring."

"We can reduce it by two," suggested her husband.

"Don't you budge from this spot, Esmund!"

"If I live to forget this moment," said O'Day hotly to Phelan as De Puyster and his two companions reached the bottom step and started along the aisle that the curious had left open for them, "I'll be over two hundred years old and have lost the use of my wits.

"So much sympathy has that patron saint of Ireland, Sir Walter Raleigh, aroused in the fickle hearts of this crowd that they'll mob us when we put hands upon the two of them."

Phelan thought the same, and started a discreet crablike motion toward the rear. "'Tis a report I must turn in, O'Day," he said.

"No, you don't!" said O'Day, grabbing out with his fist. "By my side you will stand until we make this pinch, and a path you will open up for me after I collar them. When they reach the center of this open space, we will drift alongside."

So enthralled had the crowd become at the rare loveliness of the scene that trains, both departing and arriving, were all but forgotten, and the city reputed to have no heart stood still and watched with soft, cloudy eyes which were, among the elderly, not untouched with actual tears.

When a sentimental wholesale butcher from the Asburys started to applaud, an appreciable ripple of responsive handclaps came from the circle and drew other viewers speedily from the more distant corners.

And just then *madame*, who had been getting red and pale by turns, spotted Phelan standing poised on the crowd's further fringe and reached a black-mittened hand for her reticule.

De Puyster, whose cheeks were the color of a certain new and famous tomato, saw the black mitten darting toward the bag. With one bound, he shook away *madame's* restraining hand on his arm, squared off, and smashed a flashing straight left against *madame's* glittering right eye that sent her spinning to the floor with a resounding crack as the back of her head hit the polished floor.

"Chivalry!" gasped Phelan. "He's knocked the poor soul off her pins."

Chill beads in one movement burst on O'Day's white face. "The re-

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serves!" he muttered to Phelan, giving him a push. "Quick, man! For the sake of St. Dennis, go you and call out the reserves."

"For the sake of my own sake I will," said Phelan, plunging into the astonished and angry roar that swelled from the amazed crowd.

"Lynch him!" yelled a small man with several bundles and gold-rimmed glasses.

"Stand back, the lot of you!" shouted O'Day, and plunged into the circle with two guns sternly waving in as many fists.

Three men and one lady fainted on the spot; and their collapse passed unnoticed in the amazing sight of *madame*, who, in a bound and a clutch, had regained an upright position and was wading in upon young De Puyster with a knowing lacing-away of right and left hooks to the head and a solid shot to the mouth that drew a trickle of blood from the youth's tight-pressed lips in spite of his clever blocking and ducking.

Once again young De Puyster's swing connected and a dull look came over *madame's* hot face during her second brief descent to the floor, where she tumbled for a count of six before she bounced back upon her feet and, with no delicacy at all, started mixing it at close quarters, where De Puyster, encountering corsets, gave up a useless tattoo he was spraying against her ribs.

"Are you mad, man?" shouted O'Day above the din, as the clutching, swinging, flaying pair flashed by.

"Exceedingly!" answered De Puyster, just before his mouth was again stopped by a slam that augured well for his dentist's immediate bank account.

Madame, with a remark whose origin should have been on no lady's lips, at once adopted the movements of the old-fashioned square dance and socked her erstwhile cavalier from all angles.

The efforts caused De Puyster to absorb a wide and fancied assortment of punishment, which was only terminated by the fact that her gray wig, due to a side swipe that connected, revolved under her bandages and became whiskers — having left at its point of departure a close-cropped poll of piglike red hair.

De Puyster, during this fractional lull in the festivities, rallied strongly enough to reach out and yank the bandage from *madame's* face and shove it hastily into one of the few remaining pockets of his coat. With a bellow of rage *madame*, who was now exhibiting a fine two-days' growth of multicolored beard, waded in, only to walk into a dozen or more straight lefts to the head, and its purlieu, before she could get in close.

"May St. Stephen preserve us, if it isn't Houdini Jake himself!" gasped O'Day as *madame* became less and less of a lady and more and more of a man, due to the fact that the battlers were half wrestling and a part of *madame's* bodice had become separated from its pins, only to be at once followed by her black skirt, which

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left exposed an article designated by esoteric initials and half-hose supported by garters, whose home town in Massachusetts shall go unnamed.

"You have gone far enough," shouted O'Day above the shrieks from the side lines and the din made by the clattering up of the reserves, with Phelan in person leading the charge.

"Far enough," agreed young De Puyster and, seeing his chance through the slit left in one eye that was still open, sent a sharp right swing to Houdini Jake's battleship jaw that crashed him for a count of seventeen and up.

"I wonder," he continued to O'Day, "whether it would be more expedient to brush up a bit here or to join Maximilian at the entrance and drive directly home."

"How was it you did it and why?" asked O'Day, removing his left foot from Houdini Jake's chest where he had held it while pushing back the crowd that had swept forward, some having been crushed on from behind by those who were more curious still.

"Absurdly simple," said young De Puyster, testing an important tooth. "When the car lurched on the way up here his hands went first to the lower part of the bandage where the Tashba was concealed, and then to his wig which had become askew. With a woman, *the order would have been reversed.*

"The real mother of that youth who, thanks to your unfortunate absorption, has escaped — made the man's method of disguise doubly impenetrable when the police made fools of themselves by trying to prove her a man. The chances were slender that they would molest her again. As for the emerald, you will find it enveloped in this."

De Puyster, with a gesture of distaste, removed the bandage from his pocket and passed it to O'Day. In its folds, sewn in a pocket, was the Tashba.

"Which one am I to pinch?" asked a reserve, while his youthful yet eager hands wove between De Puyster and the groaning figure on the floor. "Or is it both?"

"The one on the floor," said O'Day, not without the trace of a sigh, "will be all for this afternoon."

Reginald De Puyster's deduction, culminating with his statement that "with a woman, the order would have been reversed," reminds your Editor of one of the classic moments in detective-story history. Classic — yet we challenge you to identify the two characters in the following quotation and name the title of the world-famous book in which the scene takes place.

"You do a girl tolerable poor, but you might fool men, maybe. Bless you, child, when you set out to thread a needle don't hold the thread still

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and fetch the needle up to it; hold the needle still and poke the thread at it; that's the way a woman most always does, but a man always does t'other way. And when you throw at a rat or anything, hitch yourself up a tiptoe and fetch your hand up over your head as awkward as you can, and miss your rat about six or seven foot. Throw stiff-armed from the shoulder, like there was a pivot there for it to turn on, like a girl; not from the wrist and elbow, with your arm out to one side, like a boy. And, mind you, when a girl tries to catch anything in her lap she throws her knees apart; she don't clap them together the way you did when you catched the lump of lead. Why, I spotted you for a boy when you was threading the needle; and I contrived the other things just to make certain. Now trot along to your uncle, Sarah Mary Williams George Elexander Peters, and if you get into trouble you send word to Mrs. Judith Loftus, which is me, and I'll do what I can to get you out of it."

Have you identified the little old lady detective, Mrs. Judith Loftus? No? Never even heard of her, you say? Think we're pulling your leg when we keep insisting that this historic brush between a boy and a sharp old she-sleuth occurred in one of the world's most celebrated and honored books? No, we're not kidding.

And you don't know what famous character in fiction is hiding behind the alias of Sarah Mary Williams George Elexander Peters?

Would it help if we told you that the book in question was written by Mark Twain?

Of course! The boy masquerading as a girl is none other than Huck Finn, and the battle of wits between Huck and Mrs. Loftus is a "forgotten" episode in deduction in that masterwork, HUCKLEBERRY FINN.

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Karl Detzer was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana. His first published work was a poem to Santa Claus printed in the "Fort Wayne Journal", in 1896. He is married, has a son, and has labored in the Hollywood vineyards; his favorite indoor sport is chess, and his favorite outdoor sport is fighting fires, especially with Engine Co. 13 of Chicago. In the first World War he started as a 1st Color Sergeant and wound up as a Captain; he emerged from the second World War as a Lt. Colonel.

His published work includes THE MARKED MAN, CONTRABANDO, *and of particular interest to detective short-story fans,* TRUE TALES OF THE D.C.I. *— detective shorts against the background of the A.E.F., World War One. His short story, "The Wreck Job," was tapped for the honor of being included in* O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD PRIZE STORIES OF 1926.

And now for the most interesting highlight in Karl Detzer's literary career: 'way back in public school in Fort Wayne, Indiana, Karl Detzer's English teacher once advised him in no uncertain terms to pick any other vocation but writing!

THE RIGHT .38

by KARL DETZER

THE coroner got up from his knees and wiped his hands, then his trousers, with his handkerchief.

"He's been dead about an hour," he offered.

Detective Sergeant Jim Casey, Michigan State Police, turned off his flashlight and ducked his head deeper into the collar of his year-before-last civilian overcoat. Rain, mixed with snow, blurred the neon sign at the all-night barbecue on Woodward Avenue Extended, a quarter-mile across the muddy field.

The body lay in a puddle outside the wire fence of the Wolverine Precision plant north of Ferndale. It sprawled on its back with arms flung outward, wet face turned to weeping sky, an old gray civilian coat half covering a blue police uniform.

Casey glanced around the huddle of men . . . Gregory, night superintendent at Wolverine Precision, big John Johnson, chief of plant police, Mertons, the timekeeper, Binski, the guard who had found the body.

"Who is this party?" Casey demanded.

Chief Johnson said, "Holmes. Frank Holmes. Yeh, plant guard. Good man. Been here four, five months, midnight to eight A.M. Yeh, this was his beat, outside the wire along this side."

Casey turned the light on his watch. It was ten minutes of one.

"You mean that he had just come

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to work at midnight?"

Binski interrupted: "Twenty minutes of. I was with him."

"Who're you?" Casey wanted to know.

"I patrol next beat north." The man pointed through the rain. "We come in twenty minutes early. You'll find it on the time clock. Frank went straight to your office, Chief."

"What for?" Johnson demanded.

"Something happened on way here, I guess. We ride same bus from Royal Oak, stop every night at Charley the Greek's for coffee." The guard nodded toward the neon sign. "After we leave there tonight, something strikes Frank's mind and he wants to see you right away."

The coroner interrupted, "I've got to run. Inquest will be tomorrow. Better call in undertaker, officer."

Casey and the plant chief both answered, "Yeh." But it was two o'clock before the body was taken away. In that time Casey determined that no one had heard the shot. About ten minutes after twelve, a noisy squall had struck, bringing rain. At its height even a man with good ears might not hear a pistol shot at a hundred yards. Casey took the dead man's revolver out of his hip holster. It was an S. & W. .38-caliber police model and had not been fired. But a slug of similar caliber had landed behind the fellow's right ear.

The office of Chief Johnson was warm and dry and Casey backed against the radiator and looked at the others. The sheriff had arrived, also Blakehouse, the plant's general manager, swinging his rimless glasses nervously, letting his voice pitch up like a kid's. Lieutenant Arthur, the Navy inspector, dripped in and stood next to Casey, with one wet leg up against the radiator. Binski was there, looking sick, and Gregory, the night superintendent, and Johnson's secretary, a fat woman named Kinder, with a head cold.

Casey asked Binski to repeat his story.

"I go past Frank's house at eleven, like usual. I whistle and out he comes. No, we don't talk much. Neither of us is a hand for talking much. No sir, he don't talk to nobody on the bus, either. We get off at the Greek's for our java . . ."

"Who was there? Anybody you knew?" Casey asked mildly.

"Why, yes, quite a few. Mr. Blakehouse . . ."

"I was picking up some sherbet for my wife," Blakehouse broke in, twirling his glasses faster. "You can ask the proprietor . . ."

"Okay," Casey said. "Who else?"

"I must have been sir," the Navy lieutenant volunteered. "I'd been in my office and needed coffee. It must have been about then."

Binski agreed, "You sure was there. You set acrost from us. Somebody else in uniform, too, soldier or marine or something, with a dame. But I remember you. You spilled your coffee."

"That's right." The lieutenant smiled. He brushed a bit of mud from

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a mended spot on his trouser leg. "It was hot."

Casey persisted, "Anybody else?"

"Why, Mr. Mertons, the timekeeper. He was eatin' a steak smothered. I tell poor Frank, now ain't that quite a steak. Must take up a whole week's voluntary ration."

Mertons, a fat man with a red face, eyed Binski distastefully.

"Who else?" Casey demanded. "Quite a family party."

"Some guys from the plant. Don't know their name."

"Did your partner, Holmes, say anything? About anyone?"

"No, sir. Tell you we don't never talk much."

"Anything startle him?"

"Dunno, sergeant," Binski finally decided. "Didn't watch close. Only outside he says sudden, 'Why, now I remember,' and starts to walk fast. I ask what and he says never mind, he wants the chief. I leave him inside the gate."

"So he remembers something." Casey looked at the faces. "How many of you was at the Greek's? You, Mr. Blakehouse. You, Mertons, You, lieutenant . . . I didn't get your name . . ."

"Arthur, sir."

"That's right, Arthur. And some workers. Have to look them up. Meantime, we'll talk to you first, Miss," he indicated the office woman. "And you, Binski. You stay too, Chief. Rest of you wait outside."

Juanta Kinder, Chief Johnson's night secretary, talked more about her head cold than about the crime. She did establish, however, that Guard Holmes appeared, agitated, at ten minutes of twelve, as Binski said, and demanded Chief Johnson. When she told him it was the boss's evening off but he might drop in at twelve-thirty, Holmes said:

"Tell him I got to see him. It's important. There's a plot . . ."

"Plot?" Casey repeated. "Sure he used that word?"

"Would I say so if he didn't?" the woman flared. "I said I'd tell the boss and this guard says okay, tell him to come to Post 5 quick. So when I tell Mr. Johnson he says okay and starts."

"What time was that?" Casey egged her.

"Twenty minutes of one."

"Plot," Casey repeated after she was gone. "Binski, that fits. Think again now."

But the guard insisted: Holmes had said nothing more, not even after they started patrol. His post, Number 4, adjoined Holmes's on the north. They each walked some hundred yards of fence. Ending his beat, Binski always waited for Holmes. Holmes walked slower than he did. He'd no idea how many trips they'd made tonight. . . . Six maybe . . . when Holmes didn't turn up. Binski waited briefly then went to investigate. Fifty yards away, he found the body in the mud.

"So I holler and run for the gate when a flashlight pokes at me and it's the chief and he orders me back to post. I yell Frank's killed and he puts

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his gun back in his pocket and . . ."

"He what?" the sheriff broke in.

"Puts his gun back and blows for the sergeant. That turns out the off-duty guards and he rushes 'em off to see if somebody's cut the wire, which they hadn't."

Johnson said, "I'd got Holmes's message and was looking for him."

"Yeh," Casey nodded slowly, "with your gun out. What sort of iron you carry, chief?"

Johnson half-smiled. "A .38 police model, same as all the guards." He stopped smiling. "What you carry yourself, sergeant?"

"Thirty-eight. Only I wasn't waving it where a guy's just been killed, if you get what I mean."

"Examine it." Johnson dropped his gun on the table.

"I may later. Why'd you have it out?"

"Guess I was uneasy . . . after what the office girl said . . . then I heard Binski holler, so I . . ."

"Okay," Casey said. "That's all now, Chief. Take your gun along. Thanks, Binski. Please send in that man Mertons."

The timekeeper was fanning himself with his hat, red face sweating, eyes sticking out as if he were choking. "I want it understood," he began, "my trouble with Holmes had nothing to do with this."

Casey's face set into blankness. The sheriff, however, demanded sharply, "What trouble?"

"Nothing to do with this . . . this murder. My God, I wouldn't kill a man for not punching the clock. Even if I did say things, I didn't mean them . . ."

Casey asked, "When'd you have this trouble?"

"Tonight when he come in, mister. Told him I'd have him docked."

"And what did he say?" Casey kept his face bland.

"Might as well tell, enough men heard us. He said, come out on his beat and he'd kick hell out of me."

"And you promised you'd come out?"

"Sure, I did mister. Only I was just talking . . ."

"A bad habit," Casey remarked. "What size gun do you carry?"

Mertons eyed him wildly. "Mister, none usually. Only today, going to the bank for the payroll, I borrowed one from a guard . . ."

"An S. & W. .38?"

"Guess that's it. But I tell you . . ."

"You had it tonight at the restaurant?"

"That's right. Only I hardly noticed Holmes there. I was busy eating."

"Where's that naval officer?" Casey said, dismissing him.

Mertons hurried out, calling: "Mister officer! You're next!"

Lieutenant Arthur tried to be cooperative. "I've only been here five days. Sent from Washington to relieve Lieutenant Commander Anderson. . . . He was the inspector here ahead of me, sir, ordered away suddenly. I arrived the day he left. So

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I'm really just getting my bearings."

"This new gadget you make here," the sheriff prompted. "It's something the Nazis would like to know about?"

The lieutenant, thin and youngish with light wavy hair, smiled. "To be sure, sir. The Japanese, also. A fire control unit, most secret. But I doubt it's connected with this . . . this . . ."

"Holmes," Casey said.

"Perhaps he had woman trouble. Some husband, perhaps. No one tried to cut the fence. Germans or Japanese wouldn't just shoot a guard. They'd attempt entry."

"Right," the sheriff said. "Better look up Holmes's record."

"What good is that?" Arthur asked "Investigate his companions here in Michigan."

"I'll do that." Casey wrote in his notebook. "What sort of gun do *you* carry, lieutenant?"

Arthur laughed. "You suspect even me, sir?" He unbuttoned his blue jacket. "Navy issued it to me just before I left Washington."

The sheriff smiled and asked: "Another .38?"

"Yeah," Casey admitted and held it close to his eyes.

"What are these letters stamped in the steel? Can't quite see. J. A. Yours?"

"Yes, sir. John Arthur. I had those put there. Always wise to mark a gun, that you carry, don't you think, sir?"

"Usually." Casey handed it back. "Sheriff, get Blakehouse."

The general manager sat down stiffly as if the chair were a witness box. He had little to offer. The plant was making a secret fire control gadget. He wouldn't tell his own wife what. Yes, he'd taken unusual precautions. No, he didn't know Holmes or Binski. "I don't spend much time among watchmen," he added and put on his glasses and stared at Casey.

Casey stared back. "Spend much time at the Greek's?"

"You have no authority to question me, but I'll submit. No, I seldom go there. Tonight I 'phoned my wife at eleven. She was waiting to play cribbage, asked me to bring some sherbet. That was the nearest restaurant."

"Speak to Holmes there?"

"This guard? Wouldn't have noticed him. I did see the navy man . . . he's new, can't think of his name. I nodded to him and got my sherbet. We had started cribbage when the 'phone rang."

"What kind of gun were you carrying?"

The man's eyes widened. "Who told you that? I have a permit."

"Let's see the gun."

Awkwardly Blakehouse laid an S. & W. .38 on the table. The sheriff laughed this time instead of smiling.

"That makes it unanimous," Casey said. "The timekeeper, guard, Johnson, Lieutenant Arthur, now you, all with .38's."

"You're not suggesting that I . . ."

"Hell, I suggest nothing. The night superintendent, please."

Gregory was a bald, sober citizen

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with a hurried air of too much unfinished business. He carried a pile of loose-leaf notebooks. "I brought the employes' files, Sergeant," he began. "Knew you'd want Holmes's background."

"Good," Casey approved. "But first . . . what make gun you carry?"

"Never carried a gun in my life."

"Then it ain't unanimous," the sheriff chuckled.

The superintendent looked at him blankly and opened a book. "Here's Holmes's record. Clean slate from the F.B.I. All our men are checked. He served in the other war, never got overseas. Had been here five months. Came from New Jersey. Employed there by Ajax Optical."

"Hum," Casey said.

"I know," Gregory agreed. "That's the concern was in the papers. Owned by Nazi Farben-something-or-other. Holmes left them nearly a year ago. Did odd jobs, then came to Detroit. Lives at . . ."

Casey wrote down the address and added: "I'd like everybody's home address. Blakehouse's . . . Yours . . . Thanks . . . Lieutenant Arthur's . . ."

"Not entered yet. Too new. Fellow worked here ahead of him, though."

Casey read aloud: "Lieutenant Commander Joseph Anderson, 2130 Grove Place, Birmingham. Thanks. Now the timekeeper's. And Binski's. Need his complete record." He scanned it twice. It offered little. Binski was 48, born in the next county; he had worked as a prison guard for twelve years, leaving the State's employ for higher wages.

"Think you can locate the workers who were over at the Greek's tonight?" Casey asked Gregory.

"Easily."

Casey picked up his overcoat. "See you all at the inquest," he told the men in the outer room.

It was nearly five o'clock when Casey found the home of the dead guard in Royal Oak. The small house was lighted at every window and neighbors were consoling the widow.

"Hate to horn in, ma'm," Casey said, "only I need to know. How'd your husband happen to quit his job in Jersey?"

"He got fired." Mrs. Holmes wiped her eyes. "Five years he worked there and if it wasn't for Kestenberg . . ."

"Who's that?" Casey demanded.

"The young one. Son of the boss. A dirty Nazi. The old man, the Manager Kestenberg, the Government's locked him up now. The young one got away to Germany. It was him had my man fired."

"How come?" Casey asked.

"It was account the radio. Frank was night watch in the optical works. He found the radio and the son sending something. Kestenberg claims it's just experiments, but he gets Frank fired."

"When was that?"

"One year ago now."

"Why'd you come to Michigan, ma'm?"

"My two sisters, they live here. Their men had good jobs." She talked

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willingly. Holmes and she were both Vermonters, celebrated their silver wedding anniversary recently; yes, he was in the Army last time; about six months and fell off a truck. Was a year in the hospital.

"Yes, sir," she said, "he draws a pension, twenty-eight a month."

"Thanks," Casey said at length. The sheriff was waiting in the car. "Want to send some telegrams," Casey told him. "Think I've got something. Have to sleep on it."

The inquest next day brought out no new facts. Lieutenant Arthur, Binski, even Blakehouse and Miss Kinder, were all good witnesses. Mertons alone got mixed; remembered only after Gregory's prodding that he'd reprimanded Holmes a week earlier for another neglect of the clock. Casey sat though the session silently, now and then putting evidence in his notebook, now and then fingering the bunch of yellow telegrams in his pocket. After the inquest, he went back to the plant and with the lieutenant and Chief Johnson, reexamined the employes' records. He finally asked:

"This navy inspector, the one ahead of you, Arthur . . . "

"Anderson, sir," the lieutenant prompted.

"Did he mention any trouble when you took over?"

"None, sir." The young fellow smiled, and Casey demanded:

"What's funny?"

"Nothing, sir, of course. The commander only said they might be making hairpins here, for all the excitement."

"Nobody even once tried any monkey business?" Casey persisted.

Chief Johnson interrupted: "Never at the plant."

"Where?"

"It wasn't anything, Sergeant. Anderson found somebody snooping outside his window. Chased 'em. Told me next day."

"You mean a window where he lived?"

"That's it. He had a room somewhere."

Casey consulted his notebook. "Birmingham."

"He heard somebody in the night."

"When?"

"Week, ten days ago. All Anderson did was tear his new blue pants, cut his leg. He had the dispensary tie it up. Guy got away. Just a prowler."

Lieutenant Arthur offered: "He was limping, sir, when I took over."

"We kidded him," Johnson added.

Casey asked, "Where'd they transfer him?"

"Didn't tell me," Johnson said. "Just didn't turn up one morning."

"He was called back to Washington, sir," Arthur volunteered. "Verbal orders. On the 'phone, I believe. I'd been ordered out to take his place. Arrived the night he left."

"Did you know him before?" Casey asked.

"No, sir."

"That's all, gentlemen." Casey closed his notebook. "He probably couldn't tell much, anyway. Suppose

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I'd better run out and look over his diggings, though."

"Any other questions here?" Manager Blakehouse asked nervously.

"I guess," Casey said, "I have as much as I'm going to get."

He sat in his car at noon and watched employees return from lunch. Blakehouse exceeded the thirty-five-mile limit hurrying in and Johnson, who had been standing in the winter sun, turned immediately through the gate. Timekeeper Mertons trod heavily from the Greek's, as if the size of his meal were bearing him down. Lieutenant Arthur overtook him and they entered together. Arthur talking, Mertons listening. Casey drove north at once, fitting together the jigsaw of ideas and suspicions. Some parts joined neatly, others gaped.

At two o'clock he stopped by a small green house on the edge of Birmingham. . . . Not very pretentious lodgings for a naval lieutenant commander, but, Casey reflected, you took what you could get these days. When no one answered at the front, he tried the kitchen.

"I want to buy nothing," an old woman said and started to shut the door. But Casey put in his foot and showed his badge.

"Police?" the woman exclaimed, and then: "I'm deef. You got to holler loud."

Casey hollered. Yes, the woman agreed, Anderson lived here. He rented the front room and bath, downstairs. He was the only one who used the front door. Her husband and the other roomer, a war worker on night shift, came and went by the kitchen.

"How long has Anderson been gone?" Casey asked.

"Gone?"

Casey could not tell whether she was surprised.

"I don't know if he's gone," she said, but she seemed anxious. "He's paid up. We never see him. I don't spy. He makes his own bed. That's the bargain. I only go in on Saturday." She objected, however, when Casey asked to see the room. Her husband had its only other key, would not return till after four from the tank arsenal.

One block up a side street, Casey parked his car and walked back to a small, steamy restaurant on the corner. A dry cleaning and tailoring establishment stood next to it. Casey looked at the clothes in the window and then, entering, talked for five minutes to the office girl; at length went into the restaurant and ordered a sandwich. From a seat by the window he could see the front door of Anderson's rooming house. He ordered another sandwich and waited. It was a long wait. He reviewed his facts. At five minutes of four he had almost given up hope when he saw a figure mounting the opposite steps.

Casey left money on the table and ran. As he crossed the curb, his hand was on his pistol inside his pocket. The door had closed as he reached the porch. He snatched the knob.

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Lieutenant Arthur faced him, astonishment in his eyes.

"Hello," Casey said affably, "what are you doing here?"

Arthur said, "Why . . . you said you were coming out, sir. . . ."

"So you decided to come along? I see. You took this room over, too, as well as Anderson's job?"

"Why, yes, sir, I did. He recommended it. I thought I told you, sir."

"Didn't hear you." Casey waited for Arthur to open the door to the bedroom.

"Step in, sir," the other finally said.

It was a neat room, thinly furnished, with two windows on the street. Casey saw them out of the edge of his eye. With the other edge he saw Arthur's quick motion. So Casey said, "I've got you covered, Kestenberg. Through my pocket. No need reaching for your gun."

"What's that, sir?"

Casey cried, "Don't 'sir' me! It's one reason I spotted you. Hands up. The Gestapo ain't the only smart cops in the world. They ought to teach you how naval officers don't ever 'sir' police sergeants." He was pushing his pocket toward the other man, watching his hands rise slowly, his mouth sag. It took only a moment to remove the .38 from its holster.

"Lift your leg now," Casey said. "Right one. Let me look. Still wearing Anderson's pants, are you? Yeh, I saw the mend there on the leg first night I saw *you*, in Johnson's office. They're Anderson's new pants that he had sewed in the shop across the street, after he tore 'em chasing you off, first time. You got in, next try. Landlady didn't hear the row because she was deaf. And Anderson left, on verbal orders. Yeh, yours. Leastways Washington says it ain't sent him any. Here, put out your arms now."

Casey fastened the handcuffs.

"And now, Herr Kestenberg, our juries ain't foolin' with Nazi spies these days. Especially ones that are American citizens. If you want to save your neck, you'd better talk."

"There were two murders," Casey explained a few hours later to the group assembled in Chief Johnson's office. "The guard was just unlucky. He happened to recognize Arthur, or Kestenberg . . . which way you want it now, fellow? Arthur or Kestenberg?"

Young Kestenberg stared defiantly and Casey said: "He called himself John Arthur so his initials would match Anderson's. Well, poor Holmes saw him there at the Greek's, and he saw Holmes, too, and got rattled and spilled his coffee. Here was the old fellow he'd got rid of once at his dad's plant, back in Jersey! The guard couldn't quite figure it. But soon's he got out in the air he remembered . . . that was his ex-boss's Nazi son, dressed up in an American uniform . . . well, he knew there was a plot, all right."

Chief Johnson brought his fist down on the table.

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"Yeh, he had to wait for you, Johnson," Casey said. "But that wasn't your fault. Only, this so-and-so didn't wait. He figured, if he could spot Holmes, then Holmes certainly had spotted him. So he shot him, from behind. Same way he'd fixed Commander Anderson after a fight. You tell 'em, sheriff."

"We found Anderson's body in a culvert over near Orchard Lake just as this . . . this . . ." the sheriff jerked his thumb at young Kestenberg . . . "this creature told us we would. Anderson was in civvies. This man's, I reckon. He'd been dead five days."

"Dead!" Blakehouse exclaimed.

Casey said, "Remember, it's a naval secret, not hairpins, you've got here. This young Nazi came out to kill Anderson and take his place as inspector. A big idea. Only," he waved his notebook at Kestenberg, "you gave it away in little things, but even the best of crooks make that mistake."

Kestenberg stiffened and his handcuffs rattled. "I gave nothing!"

"Tipped me off that you'd known the guard before by saying, 'Investigate his companions here in Michigan.' Showed you knew he'd come from somewhere else. And you saw no use in looking up his record.

" 'Navy issued you a gun,' you said. Well, I happen to know, if you didn't, Navy never issues guns to officers ashore. You get 'em from the armorer, aboard ship. And it never issues .38's, afloat or on the beach. Only .45's. If a guy ashore wants a gun, he buys any kind anywhere, the way Anderson did."

He picked up the weapon Kestenberg had carried.

"These initials are worn, too, not fresh. Anderson had it a long time. He was a saving kind of guy. I checked. Lived in a cheap room, wore mended pants." He swung on Kestenberg. "Got anything more to say for yourself, Nazi?"

"The government in Berlin will help me."

"Oh, it will? Well, save your breath asking for it," Casey said. "You'll need all you got. Won't have any very long."

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will include two prize-winning stories:

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CURTAIN by *Helen McCloy*
THE FLYING CORPSE by *A. E. Martin*
and
CORKSCREW by *Dashiell Hammett*
THE LONG WORM by *Stuart Palmer*
BLIND MAN'S BLUFF by *Roy Vickers*

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It is sometimes highly revealing to compare American and English dust-wrappers. For example, let us examine the dust-jackets on Margery Allingham's first book of short stories. MR. CAMPION: CRIMINOLOGIST *appeared in the United States in 1937, published by The Crime Club, Doubleday, Doran. Typographically, the wrapper places emphasis on the title of the book, with secondary stress on the author's name. The illustration shows a page in a loose-leaf notebook, with comments in typewriter type on some of Mr. Campion's cases; this is surrounded with small sketches of clues — two bottles of wine, an ornate clock with a nude figure sitting on it, a scarecrow, a gun, and so on. The English edition, with radical changes in the table of contents, was published in 1939 by William Heinemann as* MR. CAMPION AND OTHERS. *The jacket presents the same basic color scheme as the American wrapper — red and black; again the primary typographic emphasis is on the title of the book, with secondary accent on the author's name; and the illustration depicts the full-length figure of Mr. Campion himself, goggled, nonchalant, and typically British. There is little to choose between the effectiveness of the American wrapper and the eye-catching appeal of the English jacket: our personal vote would go to the English version as simpler and slightly more striking.*

Now let us read what the anonymous blurb-writers had to say. The American approach was strictly factual: the jacket-copy writer wrote: "Albert Campion, the ever-popular favorite of mystery fans, returns again in a book which contains seven important episodes from his case-book." This is followed by a listing of the seven cases, with short comments on each plot. And that is all. The English blurb-writer is more leisurely in his (or her) descriptive approach; the blurb begins: "In the intervals between his more complicated cases Mr. Albert Campion, the celebrated Universal Uncle and Young Man Come About The Trouble, has had many shorter but none the less interesting adventures. Nine of these have been selected from his case-book and are here presented for the first time in collected form." After this mild-mannered statement come a few comments on the stories — and again, that is all.

Both editions — the American and the English — contain first book-appearances of various Campion shorts; so both editions are true "firsts" — no collector or aficionado is worthy of the name unless he possesses copies of both editions. Yet, it must be confessed, no collector or aficionado could possibly guess the real importance of these two volumes judging by the dust-wrapper remarks alone. And that is our fundamental quarrel

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with both the American and English publishers: neither was apparently aware of the true importance of Margery Allingham's first book of short stories. Both publishers treated the book as a sort of fill-in between Margery Allingham's novels—a universal attitude to the detective short story on the part not only of publishers but of critics and, we are sorry to add, most writers themselves. It makes us feel, constantly and discouragingly, like a voice singing in the wilderness. For the plain, simple truth is that MR. CAMPION: CRIMINOLOGIST *and* MR. CAMPION AND OTHERS, *considered as a single publication with variations in text, is one of The 101 Most Important Books of Detective Short Stories ever offered to the reading public.*

We defend this critical opinion by continuing to bring you Margery Allingham's "unknown" (and seemingly unappreciated) short stories. "The Case of the Frenchman's Gloves" is one of the Campion cases in the English edition which (fortunately for EQMM) was not included in the first American book of Margery Allingham's shorts. To the best of our knowledge this is the earliest appearance in print in the United States of one of Miss Allingham's suavest and most literate short stories.

THE CASE OF THE FRENCHMAN'S GLOVES

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

MR. ALBERT CAMPION was considering the hundred and fifteenth unintelligible oil painting under the muslin-shaded lights of the Excelsior Gallery's stuffiest room, and wondered if it was honest reaction or merely age which made him yearn for an occasional pair of glueyeyed, human-faced dogs by old Mr. Landseer. A pathetic sigh at his shoulder recalled him to his duty as a nursemaid. He glanced at Felicity apologetically.

"Do you like this?"

"Tremendously," said Miss Felicity Carrington stoutly, adding, with a touch of candor induced by sheer physical exhaustion, "if you do."

A memory of his own youth returned to Mr. Campion enlighteningly.

"My dear child," he said, "my *dear* child, you're not enduring this for my sake, are you?"

Felicity blushed, bringing it home to her escort that the fashion in nineteen-year-olds had changed. He felt kindly disposed towards "Alice's girl," who had been handed over to him to amuse for the afternoon. She was certainly extraordinarily pretty. The first time he had seen her, he re-

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membered, she had been bald, toothless, and crimson in the face at a christening party, and he was gratified to see what Time could do.

"Let's get this straight," he suggested. "I thought you told me you wanted to go to a picture gallery to see something modern? I trust you didn't do that to put me at my ease?"

"Well," Felicity's large gray eyes were honest, "Mother did hint that you were frightfully clever, and it occurred to me that you might take a bit of living up to. A picture gallery seemed the only safe bet. Don't be annoyed. I only wanted to put you into a good mood."

Mr. Campion's lean face split into a smile.

"That's a mistake," he said, piloting her towards the door. "That's Mistake Number One in the art of being taken out. Never try to please the man. It gives him a sense of superiority, and superiority breeds discontent. What would you really like to do? Eat ice cream?"

The girl regarded him seriously. It appeared she was giving the question earnest thought, so that he found her final pronouncement surprising.

"What I'd like most, more than anything else in the world," she said at last, "is to go to the Hotel Balsamic and have some tea."

"The Balsamic?" he echoed blankly. "You've got the names muddled. You mean the Berkeley."

"No, I haven't. I mean the Balsamic. I'd rather go there to tea than anywhere else on earth."

"You're not only original, my girl, you're unique," said her escort, obediently handing her into a cab. "Ever been there before?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't. I know it's not very gay."

"Gay?" Mr. Campion considered. "No," he said at last. "The Balsamic is respectable, comfortable, worthy, florid, English, unutterably decent, but gay — no. I hear they've met the changing mode with a small unsprung dance-floor and a string band, but if it's food you're after, the French pastries should be excellent. Do you still want to go there?"

"Yes, please," said Felicity, adding abruptly: "Tell me about your mysteries. You're terribly clever at clearing them up, aren't you?"

Mr. Campion leaned back in a corner of the taxi and stretched his long legs.

"I'm brilliant," he said, regarding her soberly from behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "Positively uncanny. I can't hide it. My best friends are always telling me. Don't run away with the suspicion that I'm vain, either. I simply happen to have X-ray eyes and all sorts of staggering personal gadgets of that sort. Nor am I proud. I'll show you my methods. For instance, I deduce from certain phenomena, obviously invisible to you but stunningly clear to me, that you, young woman, have been buttering me up all the afternoon with intent to convert my power to possible use in the near future. I deduce, further, that you have a small private mystery

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that you'd like cleared up, and that that mystery is connected with the venerable old Balsamic. Am I right?"

Felicity sat in her corner, silent and reproachful. She was at the small-cat stage, with enormous eyes, a pointed chin, and a little delicate neck rising up out of a scarlet choker.

"I'm so sorry." Mr. Campion was contrite. "When I get a chance to do my trick I can't resist it. Any opening goes to my head like wine. What's up? Lost something?"

Felicity's triangular mouth opened hesitantly.

"*I* haven't," she began. "But . . ."

"Not A Friend?" said Mr. Campion firmly. "I'm sorry, but as part of your educational system I cannot pass that. This is Rule Two. Avoid A Friend. He or she is a Mrs. Harris whom no one likes. A Friend is dead. A Friend is a myth who never ought to have existed. As an alibi he's worse than being caught with the silver in a sack.

The girl sat up.

"You think you're clever, don't you?" she said with sudden spirit. "Do you know what I think of you? I think you're bogus. A silly old fraud."

Her companion sighed and settled down.

"That's fine," he said. "I knew the ice must break if only the pressure was great enough. Now that we understand one another, what's the trouble? Who has lost what?"

Felicity was mollified.

"I'm not taking anything back yet," she said warningly, "but I admit I did have a purpose in trying to put you in a useful frame of mind. It's Madeleine. Madeleine was at school with me, at Paddledean, and we're still great friends. She's living over here with some English godparents down in Cornwall, but of course they haven't any authority at all. I mean, her father is the real court of appeal. So when she got engaged and the wretched Roundels became so difficult she had to write to him and . . ."

"Wait," said Mr. Campion hastily. "Wait. My trick doesn't seem to be working. Let's do it again. Begin with Madeleine. Madeleine who?"

"Madeleine Gerard."

"I see. She's living in Cornwall with some English godparents. She's a Frenchwoman?"

"Well, of course!"

Mr. Campion looked hurt.

"There's no 'of course' about it," he said firmly. "That's the worst of you amateurs. You take my astounding gifts for granted after the first performance. Well, now, Madeleine Gerard, French, young, educated at Paddledean, and living with English people in Cornwall, has got herself engaged. So far, that's all right. Then we come to someone called Roundel. There can hardly be two families in Cornwall with that all-embracing name, so I take it you mean Sir Nigel Roundel and his good lady? They have, I seem to remember, about seventeen daughters and one small male lamb and heir called Henry,

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who must be about twenty. Madeleine, I take it, has got engaged to Henry? Unofficially, no doubt."

Felicity laughed.

"I do take it back. You're not bad," she said. "You're right, even down to the part about it being unofficial. The Roundels are hopelessly old-fashioned and County in the worst sense of the word. Also they've got it in their heads that Henry is the most important thing on earth. The trouble is that both Henry and Madeleine are under age, and whereas the Roundels don't exactly say, or even think, that Madeleine isn't perfectly suitable, they want to make sure. You do see, don't you?"

"I do indeed." Campion, who had met Sir Nigel and had a vivid memory of that sturdy old gentleman, spoke with understanding. "So Madeleine wrote to her papa. Where does he live, by the way?"

"In Vaux." Felicity was warming up to her subject and he was glad to note that all trace of restraining respect had vanished from her manner. "That was a blow. You see, he's old-fashioned, too, and apparently he had some other idea for Madeleine's future. He's pretty rich, I think. Anyway, he wrote back a very stiff letter to Madeleine and everything was rather awkward. Madeleine and Henry stuck to their guns, however, and finally, after a lot of excitement and polite letters in bad English to Sir Nigel, followed by rather rude ones in worse French to Monsieur Gerard, it's been arranged that there shall be a luncheon party at Claridge's tomorrow for the parents to meet and discuss things. M. Gerard is in London now, and the Roundels are coming up from Cornwall tonight.

"Madeleine," she continued, "has been staying with us since the beginning of the week and the tension is pretty high. It's a dreadful set-up. Apparently Madeleine's father hadn't been to England for fifteen years and feels he's making an enormous concession in coming as far as London to see the Roundels, and the Roundels feel it's monstrous that they should have to come to London to see M. Gerard, whom they insist on regarding as illiterate and 'in trade.' The whole affair has been nearly shipwrecked half a dozen times, but Madeleine and Henry are convinced that if only the meeting comes off it'll be perfectly all right. Everything hinges on the lunch, doesn't it?"

"Food sounds to me to be the only hope," said Mr. Campion dryly. "Let us trust not a forlorn one. What has Madeleine lost? The meal ticket?"

Felicity did not reply immediately. The taxi had pulled up at the discreet entrance of the Balsamic Hotel, and not until that vast foyer had swallowed them up did she return to the subject.

As they settled themselves at one of the tea tables in the gloomy Palm Garden and glanced round at the three other adventurous couples who had braved that dignified wilderness of napery, she spoke again.

"It doesn't look a — a fishy place,

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does it?" she said candidly.

"Fishy?" Mr. Campion was startled. "My dear child, nothing more questionable than a sly Episcopal pun in Greek can ever have enlivened these revolting tomato-and-ormulu walls. Look here, let's get back to Madeleine. She's beginning to worry me. What can the poor girl have lost here, of all unlikely places?"

Felicity raised her large eyes to his. "Her father, of course, silly," she said.

Campion blinked.

"Dear me, that's almost vital, isn't it? His patience with Sir Nigel as a correspondent gave out, I suppose. How very unfortunate for young love, though. Hasn't there been any word of explanation? Has Papa simply not turned up here?"

"Oh, no, it's nothing ordinary like that." There was an engaging directness in the young eyes. "You see, he's lost *in* the hotel. He's staying here — at least, that's what the management says. But he didn't come to call for Madeleine as he promised on Tuesday night. She waited for him, feeling rather scared because she knew he was angry with her, and on Wednesday she called up this hotel, where he had booked rooms. They admitted he was staying here, but they said he'd gone out. She left a message, but he didn't answer it, and since then she hasn't heard a word. This morning she was so nervy that she called here. The people at the office place were awfully polite but not very helpful. They simply repeated what they'd said before."

Felicity hesitated and added with sudden *naïveté*, "Madeleine's very young and rather shy, so I don't suppose they thought she was very important. She asked Mother's advice, and Mother, she said, thought it was safest to leave him alone and just trust that he'll turn up at Claridge's. It's terribly unkind of him, though, isn't it? I mean, he must realize what the suspense is like for Madeleine."

Her companion considered the case of the harsh French parent.

"Gerard," he said at last. "What sort of business had Père Gerard over here?"

"I don't know. He's very rich in that quiet French way and has something to do with precious stones, I think."

Mr. Campion bolted a small portion of buttered tea-cake and swallowed hard.

"We're not discussing Edmond Gerard by any chance, are we?" he said. "*The* Edmond Gerard?"

"Yes, that's the man. Do you know him?"

"I know of him." Mr. Campion was thoughtful. "He's a very famous and distinguished person in an exclusive sort of way. I heard his name the other day. Oh, yes, he's rumored to have the governing interest in Bergère Frères, who are an enormous jewel firm with houses in London, Paris, and Amsterdam, but he's far too magnificent to worry his head about business. Dear me, the bluff Sir Nigel must have put a large riding-boot right into it. 'In trade,' indeed! My

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hat, that's going to be a sensational luncheon!"

"If it comes off," said Felicity gloomily. "I don't care how important he is, he's been a pig to Madeleine. It's so odd, because he's very fond of her, although he's so strict, and she adores him. Her mother died when she was a child. That's why his behavior is so unreasonable. What are you thinking?"

Mr. Campion was frowning.

"It is unreasonable," he said. "Thunderingly unreasonable. Almost unlikely. The hotel people said quite definitely that he was staying here, you say?"

"Yes, they told Madeleine so this morning. He's been here since Tuesday. Can't you find out where he is and if he's going to turn up at Claridge's tomorrow?"

She looked very young and hopeful seated before him, natural color in her cheeks, and in her eyes an engaging faith in his power to work small miracles. Campion was touched and, what was more, his curiosity was aroused.

"There is one way of finding out a little," he said at last. "I don't altogether approve of this as a method, but if one suspects the front door may be closed in one's face the intelligent caller slopes quietly round to the back."

He took a card from his case as he spoke and, scribbling a few lines upon it, beckoned to a waiter.

"Is Ex-Inspector Bloomer still here?"

"Yes, sir. No trouble, I hope, sir?"

"I hope not too," agreed Mr. Campion affably. "If it's convenient I'll meet him in the foyer in five minutes. Rule Number Three," he continued, turning to his pupil as the man went off. "Never forget an Old Face, especially if it's in the Force. Bloomer — don't be misled by his name — was quite an ornament in the City police some years ago. I don't mean anything flashy, mind you. Bloomer was always something solid and good. When he retired he received the job of house detective here as a man in a different profession might receive a quiet country rectorship. He's the man for our money. I'll be back in ten minutes. You needn't save me an éclair."

His time estimate proved entirely wrong, as it happened. To his surprise he found the ex-inspector not only ready but eager to discuss M. Edmond Gerard. Bloomer had aged and widened in his three years at the Balsamic, and his close-cropped hair was white, but he still possessed that blue-eyed innocence of expression which his visitor remembered so well.

"Come into my office," he invited, as soon as Gerard's name was mentioned. "It's a cosy little place; sound-proof door, too. You can't be too discreet in this house. To tell you the truth I'm glad someone's going to bring the subject up. Three days is a long time for an elderly bloke to wander about London, without his luggage, say what you like."

Campion controlled his question

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until the sound-proof door closed behind them, but once there he put it with some force. "Do you mean to say Edmond Gerard hasn't slept here since Tuesday?"

"He hasn't slept here at all," said Bloomer cheerfully. "The management tells me not to be fussy, but he was a respectable, oldish cove, you know; not at all the type to go off gallivanting. He came in early on Tuesday, took up his reservations, and went out without leaving a message. That's all we've seen of him. At five-fifteen a Hatton Garden firm called Bergère Brothers rang through and asked if he'd come in. The clerk told them no, but promised to 'phone when he did arrive. He didn't show up all night. In the morning, just when we were going to ring them, Bergère's 'phoned again. We said we were alarmed and they shut us up at once. They said he was a director of their firm and that they would take full responsibility for making inquiries at the hospitals and so on. They were very insistent that it wasn't necessary to call the police and, between you and me, we weren't keen on that idea ourselves."

He grinned. "We're slightly la-di-dah here, you know. In our opinion the police are a very common lot."

Campion sat on the edge of the table and digested this alarming information.

"Did M. Gerard get any other calls?"

"Oh, yes, I was forgetting. A little girl 'phoned every two or three hours yesterday and today she came round. They put her off. She was very young, the clerk said, and she said that she was Gerard's daughter, but he was a Frenchman, you see, and she was so obviously English — not a trace of accent. Somehow we didn't altogether believe her."

Campion laughed abruptly.

"Poor child!" he said. "That's one of the disadvantages of a really good education, Bloomer: no one allows for it. I say, this is very odd."

"I don't like it." The old man shook his head. "But what can you do? If a guest books a suite in advance and leaves his luggage in it there's nothing to stop him. His firm hasn't found him yet because they keep 'phoning, but they still say it's okay for us to wait. We don't want a fuss. He may have three or four unofficial families to see over here, for all we know."

"That's unlikely," murmured Campion. "I'd like to see those rooms of his. What about it?"

"Oh, I couldn't do that, sir!" The old man was honestly scandalized, so that it was a tribute to his visitor's powers of persuasion that ten minutes later they entered the deserted suite together.

The two rooms with the adjoining bathroom showed no signs of occupation whatever, apart from the two neat hide cases standing on the luggage bench. Nothing was unpacked. The soap in the bathroom was still a fresh cake. Clearly the visitor had merely seen his baggage safely depos-

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ited before walking out again. Mr. Campion regarded the suitcases wistfully.

"No, sir, we couldn't. It's more than my job and my pension are worth." Bloomer sounded adamant this time, and his visitor sighed.

"You hold things up so," he said. "Think of that poor child waiting downstairs."

It took him another five minutes' hard persuasion, and when he finally discovered that the cases were unlocked Bloomer was standing with his back against the door, listening for footsteps, with the sweat standing out on his forehead.

"Hurry, for Pete's sake," he whispered huskily. "You frighten me, you do. Found anything yet?"

"Cut-up corpse," said his colleague, sepulchrally.

"No!" ejaculated Bloomer, deserting his post.

"No," agreed Campion, turning over a pile of white shirts with deft fingers. "No, not even a bundle of Government plans. Not even a dirty collar."

He closed the second case and went over to the soiled-linen basket. Its yield seemed to interest him. It contained one pair of crumpled gray cotton gloves and no more.

He stood looking at the gloves, which he spread out side by side on the bed.

"That's very curious," he said at last. "Don't you think so?"

"Well, no, Mr. Campion, I can't say I do, since you ask me."

"This basket would have been cleared before M. Gerard took possession of the room?"

"I should hope so."

"Well, then, since this suite hasn't been occupied by anyone else, presumably he left these."

"Very likely. Why not?"

"Nothing. Except that it's very odd that these should be *all* he left. Don't you see, Bloomer, the old boy didn't even change his shirt. Think of it: he's come from Paris, traveled all night, come up from Southampton on the early train, and yet he doesn't bathe, doesn't shave, doesn't even change his collar. I admit there are men who are above such trifles as soot round the cuff-band, but this lad wasn't one of these. He's only over here for four days and yet he's brought three suits, eight shirts, and a neat little soiled-linen bag embroidered with his monogram, to say nothing of a nest of collars. Why didn't he change? And what in the name of goodness does he look like by this time?"

Bloomer frowned.

"Does seem funny when you put it like that," he said. "What about the gloves? They don't look like part of a smart gentleman's outfit to me. Gray cotton . . . that's not very natty."

"Not so much natty as necessary," said Campion. "On the Continent, my good Bloomer, the trains are so inclement that the intelligent native traveler always provides himself with a pair of these to keep his hands clean.

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That's what makes it all so infernally fishy. Apparently the eminent M. Gerard rushed up here, tore off his gloves, and rushed down again. Besides, there's something curious about the gloves, don't you think?"

Bloomer looked at them steadily for a long time.

"The right one is dirty," he said at last.

"So it is," agreed Campion, and put both gloves in his pocket. "Don't worry about trifles," he insisted, brushing aside the detective's protest. "We've got to get a move on. I want a cab and my poor patient Felicity."

Bloomer gaped at him.

"Here," he said, "you don't think there's something criminally serious up, do you?"

"I hope not," said Campion.

He repeated the same sentiment five minutes later to Felicity as he helped her into a taxi. "Now you know what you have to do?" he said, leaning in at the door. "Mr. Bloomer will be waiting here for you both. After that, go straight on to Scotland Yard and ask for Superintendent Stanislaus Oates."

"All right." Felicity was scared but game, and her round eyes were anxious. "Madeleine's going to be frightfully nervous. I suppose you realize that? It's not only about the luncheon. She's terribly fond of her father. I haven't made that clear, I'm afraid."

"I detected that," said Campion, grinning at her cheerfully. "Don't worry. Stick to the instructions on the bottle and we'll all go to the party. You take the high road and I'll take the low and I'll be on the Embankment before you. That's a bet."

As he stepped back and nodded to the driver his smile faded, and by the time he had captured another taxi and was on his way to Hatton Garden he was frowning, yet he was as good as his word. When Miss Felicity Carrington and Mlle. Madeleine Gerard were conducted up to Superintendent Stanislaus Oates's office a little over half an hour later he was there to introduce them.

The Superintendent rose as they appeared. His gray face was even more lugubrious than usual, but he brightened up a little at the sight of Felicity. Oates had an avuncular spot in his heart for what he privately described as "a County blonde."

Madeleine was a surprise to Mr. Campion. He had imagined, for some reason or other, a little dark seventeen-year-old, so that the tall, willowy young woman with the sleek ash-blonde hair and the indescribable air of chic about her was unexpected. She was trembling with nervousness and her first remark explained much that had puzzled Campion.

"I ought not to come to the police. My father will be so angry. He hates any sort of interference. Yet nothing could have happened to him, could it?"

The Superintendent smiled disarmingly.

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"Suppose we sit down," he said. "I think we can consider this an unofficial talk for the time being. We can get a bit forrader without Mr. Gerard ever knowing anything about it, if it all turns out to be normal."

"The signature wasn't normal," cut in Felicity. "We did what you said, Albert. We went to the hotel and Mr. Bloomer showed us the register. Madeleine was startled by the signature; it was so shaky."

"It's my father's writing, but it's so unsteady," murmured Madeleine. "I'm so afraid he's been taken ill. What can we do?"

Oates glanced at Campion.

"According to Bloomer, Bergère Frères are taking care of that end," he said. "I think, somehow, we ought to have them represented at this little conference. You got nothing out of them, you say?"

Campion shrugged his shoulders.

"I was not exactly pitched out," he admitted. "But the visit was not productive. I never met people who were so anxious not to talk to me."

"That was a change for you, wasn't it?" said Oates with relish. "If I may say so, it's authority you lack, my lad."

"Which is why I'm here, of course," agreed Mr. Campion cheerfully. "With my brains and your authority what could we two not accomplish? I don't want to hurry you, Superintendent, but these offices in Hatton Garden sometimes shut. As it is, I very much doubt if you'll get anyone to come down here."

Oates took the hint.

"I'll 'phone them from the other room," he said, rising. "We'll see what my not-so-celebrated charm will do.

He returned in five minutes, grave but secretly pleased with himself.

"Mr. Kenway will be with us," he announced, eyeing Campion with a faint gleam in his eyes. "He said you'd called. It seems he couldn't see you. He's the manager. Do you know him, Miss Gerard?"

"I? Oh, no. I'm afraid I don't know anything about my father's affairs. I wish I did. Has this man seen Daddy?"

"Yes. Apparently he called on Tuesday afternoon. Since then they haven't heard from him."

"But where is he? This is terrifying." The girl was obviously frightened and the superintendent's manner became heavily kind.

"Don't worry too much, young lady," he said. "He's not in a hospital. Mr. Kenway seems to have made certain of that. As a matter of fact, I thought Bergère's were relieved to hear from me. I couldn't understand why they hadn't been here themselves, but apparently they have the same ideas about your father that you have yourself. He's a little autocratic, is he? Likes to go his own way?"

"He doesn't like interference at all," murmured Madeleine Gerard, and sounded as though she knew what she was talking about.

Oates pulled a pad towards him.

"Could you give me a description of your father?" he inquired. "Don't

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be alarmed. This is only routine. Now, what age would he be, please?"

Mr. Campion read the penciled note over the superintendent's gray-tweed shoulder.

Age: 61. Height: 5 ft. 7 in. approx.
Hair: Grayish-white.
Weight: She doesn't know at all. Fattish. Complexion: pale.
Eyes: Gray-blue.
Clean-shaven.
Wears no rings. No distinguishing marks she can think of. Probably smartly dressed.

As the policeman finished writing he glanced up at Campion.

"Any comments?"

"I was wondering . . ." The younger man's tone was diffident. "Mademoiselle Gerard, what are your father's recreations? Is he keen on any sports?"

"No." Madeleine looked puzzled and so, to do her justice, did the Superintendent. "He spends all his time in his study and in the strong-room in the little château at Vaux. I don't think he has any recreation at all, unless you count his violin."

"His violin?" There was an inflection in Campion's voice which made Oates stare at him. "He still plays, you say?"

"Yes. Only to amuse himself, of course. He's a recluse, Mr. Campion. He likes to be alone. He lives alone. He travels alone. He hates to give any account of himself and loathes any intrusion on his privacy. That's why I'm so afraid I ought not to be here. And yet I'm so frightened he may have been taken ill."

There was a charming honesty in her manner which made Campion like her, and he made a mental note of the fact that young Henry Roundel was a lucky youngster.

"Don't get alarmed, Miss Gerard. There's no need for that." Oates turned away from Campion, whom he had been watching with terrier-like curiosity, to make the reassurance. "That's very interesting, but I'm afraid it's not going to help us much. Ah, here's the man we want."

Richard Kenway came hurrying into the room, past the helmetless constable who had announced him, like a very small train shunting into a station. He was a short, plump person, dark in the hair and pale in the face, and at the moment he was breathless and startled out of his wits. He shook hands with Oates, nodded coldly to Campion, and pounced on Madeleine with relief.

"I had no idea that M. Gerard had a daughter over here or I'd have got in touch with you at once," he said earnestly. "This is terrible. Haven't you seen your father at all? Didn't you meet him at the station?"

"Oh, no, he'd never have forgiven me." Madeleine spoke with deep conviction. "He doesn't like what he calls being fussed. Don't you find that?"

Mr. Kenway passed a plump white hand over his hair. He coughed.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "that was the private information which we received from our Paris house. That

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was how it all happened. Dear me, this is terrible! Our hands have been tied, and we've been sitting about doing nothing while anything may have happened to him, anything!"

"Oh, I hope not, sir, I hope not." Oates spoke firmly and raised his eyebrows at the visitor. "Suppose you tell us about M. Gerard's visit to you? He called about half-past four in the afternoon, I understand?"

"Yes, he did." Mr. Kenway hesitated. "I don't know if I'm doing the right thing. This is an impossible situation. I really think I'd better tell you the whole story. If it proves to be indiscreet I must take the consequences. First of all I must disclose a trade secret. Although the firm of Bergère Brothers is now virtually owned by M. Gerard, he doesn't bother himself with business; in fact, he affects to know little or nothing about it and is even celebrated for his casualness and unconventionality in these affairs. May I say that, mademoiselle?"

Madeleine nodded. "I believe that is his reputation," she said. "I've heard he's rather terrifying. He wanders about with stones loose in his waistcoat pocket. That's the kind of thing you mean, isn't it, Mr. Kenway?"

The jewel broker wiped his forehead.

"That is the kind of thing," he agreed dryly. "Added to that there is this dislike of ceremony, any sort of interference, or — er — any friendliness; I had almost said any ordinary business civility. Our Paris manager warned me, in so many words, not to ask him to lunch, or even to make any effort at conversation. Well, there we were on Tuesday morning, all very much aware that our principal was due at any moment. We had a very fine collection of unset rubies which we knew he was interested to see, and the whole staff was hanging about on tenterhooks, myself included, until four-thirty in the afternoon. We had almost given him up when he walked in, produced his credentials, and asked to see the rubies. It was just like that: as formal and peremptory as if he had nothing to do with the firm at all."

He paused and shook his head over the experience.

"Frankly, I saw at a glance that he was not faintly interested in me, even as another human being, so I imitated his own manner. I studied his credentials, handed them back to him, and opened the safe. He sat down at the table and began to examine the tray of stones which I set before him. After a while he glanced up and said in French: 'Don't disturb me for half an hour.' Naturally I left him. I waited in the outer office for nearly an hour. When at last I did go back the door from my room to the corridor was open and he had gone. I haven't seen him since. He had evidently finished his examination and not bothered to summon me. The elevator boy who had brought him up naturally took him down again and he walked out of the building."

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"I see. Not an easy gentleman to entertain," said Oates in a valiant attempt at tact. "Then you rang up the hotel?"

"Yes. Yes, I did." Mr. Kenway seemed to be struggling with himself. Finally his anxiety prevailed. "There is one thing I haven't made clear," he said huskily. "When M. Gerard went out he took the rubies with him."

Oates smothered an exclamation. "And yet you didn't report the matter?" he demanded.

"My dear sir, how dared I?" Mr. Kenway was almost weeping. "They were his own stones. The whole firm belongs to him. I had express instructions from Paris, from M. Bergère himself, that M. Gerard was to be treated with the utmost care. He was to have anything he wanted. I was to do anything, absolutely anything he told me. M. Bergère himself is something of an autocrat. He does not tolerate failure in a subordinate. I have not dared to report the affair to him yet. I gave myself until tonight, hoping against hope that M. Gerard would return. Now I must 'phone Paris and, frankly, I might as well hand in my own resignation at the same time."

"Don't be too hasty, sir." The Superintendent sounded genuinely sorry for the little man. "Give us a chance to do what we can. This was the first time you'd met Mr. Gerard, was it?"

"Yes. No one on this side knows him. He hasn't been in England for a great many years. He hardly ever leaves his home. The news of his visit was a great surprise to us."

"I see. Here's Miss Gerard's description of her father. Can you add anything to it?"

Mr. Kenway took the slip of paper and read it carefully.

"No," he said at last. "No, that's accurate as far as it goes. He wore a gray suit and a soft hat, ordinary but very good. He spoke French all the time. No, I don't think I noticed anything else."

"Did he gesticulate when he talked?"

Mr. Campion's mild question sounded a trifle silly and even Oates stared at him, while Mr. Kenway chose to be irritated.

"He did not, sir," he said. "As far as I remember he was very quiet. He stood with his left hand in his pocket, and his glove and stick in the other most of the time I was with him."

"Really?" Mr. Campion's vacant expression had misled many a shrewder man than Mr. Kenway; and when the angry little broker had turned away in disgust Campion wandered towards the door. "I think I'll go down and see Pleyel, if you don't mind, Superintendent," Campion said quietly. "I'll call you on the house 'phone. We might have to hurry."

Oates stood looking at the door for a moment, an expression of incredulity growing in his eyes. The mention of the name had started a train of thought in his mind which was enlightening.

Inspector Pleyel spent most of his

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days looking over the Rogues' Gallery, now that his more active career was past, and in that department he was known disrespectfully as The Elephant. Since he was a slender, somewhat shriveled man the name seemed pointless until one had once seen him at work. After that, however, its appositeness was obvious. Inspector Pleyel and the great beasts had one important attribute in common: like them, he never forgot.

Oates was watching his secretary attending to the formalities of certain official statements when the buzzer on his desk vibrated and Campion's voice came up to him.

"The address is 39 Welkin Street, Soho," it said, sounding thin and faraway as the instrument distorted it. "Pleyel recognizes my description. The name is Marcel Lautrec. Do you know him? He's been out of jail for about three months and was last seen with Lefty Rowe and a fellow called Patsy Carver."

"I know Rowe and Carver." The Superintendent's tone was grim. "What's this 39 Welkin Street?"

"Pleyel says it's a cheap eating-house with lodgings above. Carver's wife runs it and Rowe has been staying there. I think we ought to hurry."

The policeman's gray face grew hard and his eyes were no longer kindly.

"You're right," he said, and added with a sudden burst of exasperation, "what a nerve, Campion! What a thundering nerve!"

The raid on 39 Welkin Street made Soho history, and that is no easy thing to do.

Two police cars swept down the narrow road and stopped with beautiful precision directly outside the entrance to the café with the steamy windows and the cracked glass door.

At the same moment a third car halted in Fern Mews, that unattractive little cul-de-sac which runs along behind the houses in Welkin Street, and from all three vehicles there stepped a number of heavily built men, all distinguished by the same peculiarly purposeful manner.

Oates took the lead, with Campion close behind him, and it was he who first strode down the narrow aisle between the tables to the curtained doorway behind the counter where the coffee urn boiled.

The rustle which heralded their appearance turned into complete silence as their escort tramped in behind them, and the company in the little dining alcoves studied their plates or their papers with the complete absorption of those who have decided to withdraw in the spirit if not in the flesh.

It was the woman who gave the alarm. She confronted them in the narrow staircase, her untidy black-gowned body blocking the way.

"Now then, Missus ——" Oates got no further. She screamed and screamed, standing there with her head thrown back and her eyes closed. The noise was deafening. But behind it there were other sounds, swift, furtive movements on the floor above.

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Campion bent his head and ducked under her arm. She hit out at him, but the blow was trifling, and her screams redoubled as a vast plain-clothes man gathered her up and carried her, kicking, into the kitchen.

Meanwhile Oates and Campion had reached the landing, which was in darkness. There they were met by an odor strange in that house. It swept down upon them from the floor above, the clean, and in the circumstances highly suspicious, odor of fresh air.

"The roof!" shouted Campion.

They caught Lefty Rowe half in and half out of the skylight. Carver was brought in much later after a wearisome chase round the chimney-pots. But it was not in these old acquaintances that Oates and his companion were most interested. There were two locked rooms on the top floor of that ill-ventilated house, each of which contained a bed, and on each bed lay a man approximately five feet seven inches in height, fattish, gray-haired, and French.

There the likeness ended abruptly, for doubles are not easy to find, and although Messrs. Rowe and Carver had been clever they had not been very lucky.

Marcel Lautrec gave himself up with the resignation of a man who has already spent the best part of his life in jail and sees no other prospect for the future. Nothing, however, prevented him from grumbling.

"It's my arm," he said bitterly, regarding his stiff sleeve. "I haven't got a chance. That's what happens to a man who loses his arm defending his fatherland."

"In a street fight in Amiens in 1926," interrupted a stolid plain-clothes man, who made no other observation throughout the entire proceedings.

Lautrec shrugged his shoulders.

"What does it matter?" he said. "It's my arm that betrays me every time. If I had had both my arms should I have been locked up here?"

Oates's grin was sardonic.

"Since you've raised the subject," he said, "let me tell you something. You were locked up by your pals because you double-crossed them. They trusted you to do a job and you let them down. Once you'd got your hands on those rubies you weren't sharing them, were you?"

Lautrec's small eyes widened in sudden terror and he began to swear violently in a mixture of Gallic and honest Anglo-Saxon, giving as varied a performance as anyone present had ever heard, which was no mean feat.

Oates let him run on for a while.

"That'll do," he said at last. "Don't exhaust yourself. You've convinced me. Where are the stones? Tucked away in a railway cloakroom? Give the ticket to the boys. Take him along," he added over his shoulder, and went into the other room where Campion was bending over the second plump Frenchman, who lay so silent upon the bed.

Campion straightened himself as Oates appeared.

"He'll do, I think," he said. "He's

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pretty tough, thank God. His pulse is fairly normal. I think they've kept him under with one of the barbituric group. When the doctor comes we'll get him back to the hotel."

The Superintendent stood looking down at the elderly man who was only so very superficially like Marcel Lautrec. His expression was faintly bewildered.

"It's the infernal *impudence*," he said. "That's what startles me every time, old as I am. Who do these darned crooks think they are? They might have got away with it, you know; that's the exasperating thing."

"That's the terrifying thing, old boy," observed Campion soberly, and for once Oates did not correct him.

It was after midnight when the two of them finally left the Hotel Balsamic. The Superintendent was in cheerful mood. He was so clearly determined to talk that Campion did not attempt to dissuade him and suggested that they should go back to his own Piccadilly flat for a drink. Oates agreed with alacrity, and a few minutes later settled himself by the open window looking down on to the traffic and raised his glass to his host.

"We deserve it," he said magnificently. "I don't want to take all the credit. You were very useful. That was quite a touching little scene between father and daughter at the hotel tonight, wasn't it? The old man's delighted with her, and well he might be. If it hadn't been for her he'd have stayed in that Welkin Street hovel until Rowe and Carver had bullied Lautrec into a sense of the realities of life."

"He did double-cross them, did he?"

"He tried to." Oates laughed. "They were far too experienced to fall for that sort of game. Lautrec's a mug. Still, he did us a good turn. He held 'em up by playing the fool. Otherwise the stones would be out of the country by this time. As it is, we'll get 'em."

Campion lay back in his chair.

"It was an ingenious swindle," he remarked. "Who is the brain there?"

"Rowe. He's an old con man and he always fails by falling back on force when cornered. He's behind the whole thing. He found out that Gerard was coming to London and that no one at Bergère's knew him personally. There's a leakage in Gerard's secretarial staff somewhere, if you ask me. Anyway, Rowe bought that information from someone. He picked up the Frenchman on the train from Paris, boarded the boat with him, and located his cabin. The rest was elementary. Gerard is notoriously a bad sailor, it appears. Rowe went in to help the old man, who was seasick, and mixed him up a dose which made him dopey.

"When they arrived at Southampton the kindly Mr. Rowe helped his new friend through the Customs and, since he was so ill, gallantly offered to drive him to a hotel. Gerard was taken off his guard and accepted the offer. Meanwhile, Carver was waiting

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with the car, by arrangement. They put Gerard in the back, where he collapsed, and Rowe got in beside him, ready to give him another shot if he recovered too soon."

"All this was at six o'clock in the morning, mind you, so there was no one about to get inquisitive. Instead of going to a Southampton hotel Carver drove to London, and when Gerard recovered consciousness he was where we found him."

He drew a deep breath and raised his glass again.

"There you are," he said; "it was impudence, sheer impudence. Gerard's reputation and temperament made the whole thing possible. He traveled alone, he wasn't known, he was doing the unusual thing."

Campion nodded. "It was neat," he admitted. "Lautrec was waiting for them in London, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. Rowe got hold of him some weeks ago. He had to use a Frenchman, you see, and someone who would conform at least to a verbal description of Gerard. Lautrec was ideal, save for his arm. His artificial arm is dangerous, but he's used to concealing it, so they took the risk. Having deposited Rowe and Gerard at Welkin Street, Carver drove to Victoria and carried Gerard's two suitcases and all his papers on to the station, where Lautrec was waiting for them. Once Lautrec had all the necessary information, hotel reservations and everything, he took a cab to the Balsamic. He had to do that, you see, in case Bergère's 'phoned through and found Gerard had not arrived. He signed the register, making such a clumsy attempt at Gerard's signature that the innocent Mademoiselle thought her father might have been ill when he wrote it. After that he went upstairs, where he left his cases and his traveling gloves, which he had worn for the benefit of the hotel folk. Then he walked out of the building, to hang about until he thought Bergère's were ready to receive him."

"Neat," said Campion again. "It's a serious thought, Oates, but it ought to have come off. Lautrec's arm let them down."

"Ye-es," agreed the Superintendent dubiously and then, since his host was uncommunicative, added with sudden bluntness, "how do you make that out?"

Campion thrust his hand into his jacket pocket and brought out a pair of crumpled gray cotton gloves. Oates waved them aside.

"You showed me those before," he said. "I don't want a lecture. I want to know how you got on to Lautrec. And what's more," he added complacently, "I'm sitting here in this chair drinking your whisky until I do know."

Campion took off his spectacles.

"It seemed so obvious to me," he said apologetically. "The kidnaping and impersonation notion flickered into my head as soon as I found that Gerard had neither bathed nor changed his linen after his journey. With that in mind I looked at the gloves and saw that while the right-

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hand one was fairly dirty, the left, although it was crumpled and had been worn, was perfectly clean. No ordinary man travels from Paris to London and arrives with one dirty hand and one clean one. There had to be a special reason for it. The obvious explanation was that the man, whoever he was, didn't use his left hand, presumably because it wasn't usable. In your office Madeleine Gerard told me that her father was a violinist. That settled it that the gloves were not his. You can do a lot of things with one hand, my good Oates, but playing the violin isn't one of them. Therefore I took it that the gloves belonged to an impersonator. It was blindingly clear, I thought."

"Yes," said Oates again. "But even old Pleyel couldn't pick out the right man when all he had to go upon was an artificial arm."

Campion sighed. "That wasn't all," he protested mildly. "Madeleine had described the real M. Gerard, superficially I admit, but at least she gave us the general impression of the man. Richard Kenway read her description and found that it tallied with his impression of his visitor, yet he, mark you, had only seen the impersonator. I went to Pleyel and asked him if he knew of any confidence man who was (*a*) French, (*b*) fifty to sixty years old, (*c*) plumpish and (*d*) one-armed. He supplied Lautrec's name at once and the current intelligence files gave us the rest."

Oates laughed. "Of course," he said. "Funny how I missed that. Well, I think that we can congratulate ourselves, don't you?"

Campion did not answer. He did not seem to have heard. There was a scandalized expression in his eyes.

"I say," he said, "this is frightful! Oates, I've forgotten Felicity. I left her in your office."

"The little blonde?" Oates was mildly interested. "She's all right. I sent her home with a sergeant from the College. Ring her up in the morning."

Campion took his advice, but Felicity was out. His afternoon call was more successful.

"My dear, don't be silly." She sounded jubilant as she waved aside his apologies. "It was thrilling. I loved it, every minute of it. You're going to get deluged with praise and bouquets from the Gerards. I'm going to be a bridesmaid."

"Are you, indeed? The lunch was not so horrific after all, was it?"

"The lunch was a success," said Felicity. "Got any more rules for me?"

Campion grinned. "Only one," he said, "and I'm afraid it's one for me. When you invite a young woman to spend the afternoon inspecting a gallery of modern art with you, don't get her taken home by a policeman."

"Rubbish," protested Felicity. "She *liked* it."

"That's the catch," said Campion.

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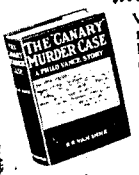
1 THE CANARY MURDER CASE



When Joseph Cochrane Robin was killed, Philo Vance observed: (1) the victim had *an arrow through his heart*; (2) the last man seen with the victim was named Sperling; and (3) Sperling *means "sparrow"* in German. "*Robin? "I." Who killed Cock Robin?*" *said the sparrow, "With my bow and arrow."*

The diabolical killer had used an old nursery rhyme as a blueprint for murder!

2 THE BISHOP MURDER CASE

Beautiful Margaret O'Dell, ex-Follies girl, is strangled to death. There were only two conceivable ways of entering the apartment—but nobody could possibly have used either! Yet somebody *did* get in, somehow. But WHO? Everybody had ironclad alibis. So Philo Vance does a strange thing. He gets all the suspects together—*for a poker game!* When it's over, he tells the D.A. who the killer is. BUT HE CAN'T PROVE IT!

3 THE GREENE MURDER CASE

Van Dine himself called this "the most sinister, the most bizarre, and certainly the most terrifying" of all his murder cases. It turned the gloomy Greene mansion into a house of horror—with the fiendish killer perpetrating a series of brutal murders. No. 1 on the "obit" parade was the eldest sister, shot by a .32. The D.A. called it robbery—until the two brothers were shot—*by the same .32!*

Continued inside cover

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